

# Letters Home

## 2nd Platoon, Echo



### **2nd Battalion, 1st Marines**

Deployment to Vietnam in 1965

Tom Isenburg



# Letters Home 2nd Platoon, Echo

Tom Isenburg

## **Dedication**

To my wife Linda, Thank you my love.

Doug and Cindy Pickersgill, Jim Little and Bonnie Campbell,  
Steve Byars, Gary and Sandy Ford, Don and Paula Hicks, Bob and Janette Shea  
and Paul Stenzel for their help and support.

To the Marines, Sailors, Airmen and Soldiers who served with us.

And to our children, Thomas and Ann, who cared enough to ask.

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## FORWARD

In March of 1998 I received an E-mail message from a Dead Marine.

Thirty-three years prior to that message, our Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Doug Pickersgill, was killed after being transferred from the Marine Platoon he had led from its formation at Camp Pendleton, California and through deployment by ship to the coast of Vietnam. He led us on our first combat raids from the beach and on the eve of one of our biggest battles he was transferred. He had been dead for 33 years – or so we thought.

During training in early 1965, we began to take on nicknames that defined us to our brothers, and which helped to shorten radio call signs. Doug's handle was "Pick" or "2-6 Actual." Our Platoon sergeant was Staff Sergeant Jim Little. His handle was "Sergeant." He scared us into using that name. My handle was "Ike" for Isenburg or "Tree" because I was 6 feet 8 inches tall. Those names were known only to those of us who served in 2nd Platoon, Echo Company.

On March 18, 1998 I got an email addressed as "Ike are you there?" "This is Pick."

Pick was alive and well. He found me through a fellow Marine who read a letter I wrote to "Leatherneck" magazine about our time in Vietnam. Doug and I met a few weeks later and caught up on family, kids, life in general and work. We were fortunate to be able to answer the question we have all asked when we lose a buddy in combat – "What would they have done, had they lived?"

Since seeing Doug, we began a search for the rest of the survivors of the Platoon. We knew that of the original 42 Marines who deployed with us in 1965, only 14 men had returned to the States. Doug wanted to find each one of them. Thanks to the staff at the San Jose Mercury News, a "Celebrations" article we wrote helped locate one of our brothers at the Palo Alto VA Hospital and through the VA locator service, two more were found. As of March 2010, we had located and visited with 8 of our brothers, including Jim Little – the "Sergeant."

Doug was also a member of an Association of Marines and Corpsmen who served with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment from the unit's formation in 1965 to its retirement in 1972. The association posts stories and pictures from the membership covering their time “in country.” But there are very few stories and photographs of the first deployment.

We felt that if stories printed in a public format could help bring us together, then somehow, our Platoon history should be told as well. We were fortunate to recover letters and photographs we sent home to our families and friends. I chose to tell the story of 2nd Platoon through those recovered letters and photographs to honor all who served in Vietnam during the early build-up.

We were the last unit to deploy from the United States and “go over the side” to make beach landings in Higgins boats just as our fathers and uncles had done in World War II and Korea. Marine units and individuals were flown into combat starting in 1966. But in 1965 we were still using tactics and ships developed before most of us were born.

As a group we felt that a book about our time in country should minimize details about our fire fights, battles or ambushes. Others have written about those moments and certainly our accomplishments as combat Marines shouldn't be dismissed – we did the job we were sent to do. Still, only those people who have been in combat would understand the tactics and the chaos of combat. And frankly if the reader wasn't in our unit during the fighting; naming some trail, hill, village or valley where the action took place would be meaningless.

This story is about our time in and around the fighting. The letters and pictures we sent home would show life outside of combat – in the rear with the gear and while on patrol. While our mission was to kill our enemy, this story is also a story of a Vietnam that differed from the standard view of the time. The countryside was spectacularly beautiful; the people very kind and considerate; and the enemy a strong adversary.

Our letters have been edited to reduce the personal content between the Marine and the folks back home. We left in comments in our letters to answer our loved ones' questions regarding the fighting because what they heard at home differed so much from what we were doing.

Finally and most importantly, I offer this history to my fellow Marines and Corpsman of 2nd Platoon, Echo Company with a wish that this story helps find our missing brothers. And, to the Sailors, Airmen, Soldiers, Nurses and Doctors who served with us from 1965 to 1966. It has been a privilege and an honor to tell our story.

Tom Isenburg  
Former Sergeant  
United States Marine Corps

## **PREPARING TO GO**

Marines were committed in two hemispheres in 1965. A revolt in the Dominican Republic in May threatened the lives of Americans and other foreigners in Santo Domingo. A battalion of Marines was landed to protect them during evacuation, and when communists threatened to take over the rebel leadership, a Marine Expeditionary Brigade was landed to preserve the peace until an Inter-American Peace Force could be formed from Latin American nations.

When communist North Vietnam stepped up its efforts to subvert the Republic of Vietnam, the U.S. met the challenge by increasing its aid to South Vietnam and bombing North Vietnam. More than 36,000 Marines assisted the South Vietnamese in resisting the aggression from the north.

In their first pitched battle with Viet Cong guerrillas, the Marines killed more than 600 of the enemy to effectively destroy a well entrenched communist regiment at Van Tuong, south of Da Nang.

With neither East nor West desiring nuclear war, communist strategy hinged on successful local "wars of national liberation," guerrilla wars aided and abetted by outside communist powers.

***You will find us always on the job – The United States Marines.***

## **FORMATION: JANUARY TO MARCH 1965**

2nd Battalion / 1st Marine Regiment was being formed between January and March 1965 with Marines and Corpsman from the 3rd and 2nd Divisions at Camp San Mateo, Camp Pendleton, CA to prepare for support to a possible invasion of the Dominican Republic.

2nd Platoon, Echo was billeted in single story cement barracks on the south side of the parade deck (near supply and the old mess hall). The order of the day was to "keep off the damn ice plants" (whatever they were).

We trained for beach and hill assaults on base. For liberty call we went to Oceanside, Long Beach (who can forget the Circus Bar) and Disneyland (the girls are over 18 and the parties start at 1am). Our senior training NCOs were WW II and Korea veterans.

2nd Platoon was led by 2ndLt Doug Pickersgill, formerly of the deep water Navy; Staff Sergeant Jim Little, a veteran of the Korean War and the "assault on the Beirut Lebanon bathers mission." Sergeants Paul Steen, George Wilson and Bill Lucas led the squads. My Fire Team leader was Corporal Dave Reyner.

## Formation Letters Home

10 January 1965

Camp San Mateo

*Marines and Corpsman arrived from various bases and stations to form the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Marine Regiment. A group of us from Camp Lejeune were assigned to Echo Company. The first couple of days were spent squaring away.*

*Marine volunteers also came from other countries. Bob Holdsworth from Quebec, Canada and Pete Jue from Shanghai, China (we kid him about being Red Chinese and he agrees with it).*

*As things stand now, we will be here 13 months! We are and will be on support until the 23rd of February. We joined a training mission called "Silver Lance" (ship to shore invasion tactics, etc.), but we won't be the John Waynes this time. Instead we will be loading and unloading ships for a month! Afterwards we go into "lock on" - which means we start training as the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Marines instead of a sub unit (most of our Battalion is overseas in Okinawa, hence the "sub unit" in the address). This training (amphibious and helicopter attacks) goes 6 weeks on and 6 weeks off, then to specialized training. We transfer to Okinawa next March, 1965, but we are on standby if needed in Santo Domingo or Indonesia.*

*Contrary to popular American opinion and although the 3rd Marine Division is in Vietnam and the 1st (Marine Division) is on alert, we still couldn't be ready to go in less than 8 months. So here we will sit and train among the mountains of Southern California.*

22 March 65

*Our field training has been almost constant. We are beginning to get Marines and Corpsman who are returning from the Pacific commands. Liberty passes were given to us when we got back to base. We took our 3 days off and went to Long Beach, Hollywood and Disneyland.*

*We checked into the USO there and got a couple of rooms through them in a nice hotel across from the "Hollywood Palace." We had a good time at the USO. They had dances with real girls, a sing along and good bands! We blew most of our pay, got very little sleep but it was worth it!*

*The Battalion formation is being completed and the Platoons are being brought up to full strength. We met our Platoon Commander, Doug Pickersgill and were assigned our respective jobs in each squad and for the platoon. Training as a full unit started before the end of the month.*

*We were briefed on possible changes to the deployment plans which will accelerate our training schedule and introduced us to new tactics called "snatch and grab" and "search and destroy." We train to back up every position in the platoon and concentrate on squad level tactics.*

## Formation Photographs

**Camp San Mateo:**

**1965 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment Home at Camp Pendleton, California**



## **TRAINING AND THE NEW MISSION: MARCH TO JULY 1965**

As part of the training for the assault on the Dominican Republic, 2/1 became the aggressor to the 27th Marines who were flown in from Chicago as if they were to invade the island republic. Operation "Crazy Quilt" tested every resource of the Regiment and the Battalion in large scale, open land based fire fights and house to house search and destroy missions, including how to use air support.

Every Marine in the company was required to know the next person's job, read and use terrain maps and be aware of the battle plan at all times. Small units, usually at squad level, operated independently of the main force for days. These small unit tactics helped us in Nam.

We were told our training would change to provide support to 3rd Marine Division as they conducted missions in Southeast Asia beginning in the summer of 1965.

Small unit tactics were emphasized even more, with most of the training conducted at night on the beaches and in the arroyos around Pendleton. Some of us were trained as Vietnamese language interpreters. Others were trained to call and manage air, sea and artillery support at the squad level.

We were designated a "Raider" company and 2nd platoon trained in rubber boats off the California Coast. We were trained to depart from submarines, land at or near inland waterway outlets to the sea and assault villages or outposts.

On one occasion we attacked an aircraft tracking radar site for Marine Air Station El Toro and were damn near shot by the Marines guarding the installation. Apparently they didn't get the word we were attacking and were not pleased at our waking them up at 3 in the morning. That same morning when we got back to the beach to return, the waves were over 12 feet high. But what the hell, we charged our rubber boats out into the surf, only to be overturned and thrown back on the beach repeatedly causing the training NCO to declare the mission a success and let us live another day.

It was during our failure as "boat surfers" that Francis Woods (Woody), Gary Ford and I become close friends. We kept pulling each other in the boats to avoid what we thought would make us shark food. We owed each other our lives then, and over and over again during our time in Vietnam.

We deployed from San Diego aboard the USS Bexar (pronounced as "Bear") a WWII troop ship apparently activated just for us. Deployment was originally scheduled for June but was delayed to 10 August

We mounted out about 12 AM on the San Mateo parade deck, August 9, 1965. Families and girlfriends were permitted to congregate around the mess hall. It was a clear night with a late rising full moon. For all of the activity to load gear and count heads there was almost no sound. We all knew that we were not going to be supporting anybody – we were going to fight.

## **Training and Mission Letters Home**

*10 April 1965*

### *Camp San Mateo*

*Constant rain in Southern California over a two week period made for good training weather because air support and supply couldn't be used. The Platoon did a lot of hiking during a 4 day training operation in the back hills of Camp Pendleton. Training in recon and "snatch and grab" intensified. We built quick cover positions, but did not train on how to make long term fortifications.*

*As of April 1 we were put on 48 hour standby alert. We are called the BLT (Battalion Landing Team) Delta. As of May 1st we will become the BLT Alpha on 24 hour standby. In other words we're next to go. All available Battalion Landing Teams (BLT) have been sent to Okinawa from Hawaii and we are the only ready Battalion left in the eastern Pacific.*

*We begin rubber boat training from submarines and fast moving patrol boats and helicopters off the beach at Pendleton. We have been designated a "Raider Company."*

*This Easter weekend will find most of us cleaning our gear and learning how to make weapons more effective under the watchful eye of our Platoon Sergeant, Jim Little, a Korea War Veteran.*

*22 May 1965*

### *Camp Pendleton*

*We returned from a 3 week combat problem designed around the recent deployment to Santo Domingo where US citizens were threatened by a force attempting to overthrow the government of that Caribbean Island nation.*

*The problem was code named "Crazy Quilt." Camp Pendleton, all 40 square miles of it, was designated a country for this problem. Our mission was to snatch and grab key political figures unfriendly to the "good guys" (our unit); and to protect the peaceful villagers of many towns on our way to liberate the capital of the fictitious country.*

*The training in small unit tactics was tested against a much larger "enemy" who had access to and used tanks, jets, artillery, helicopters and large numbers of ground forces*

against us. But because of our Platoon's small size, our squads were able to disrupt the "enemy" operations by stealing their trucks, water and food. We also jammed their radio signals and ambushed them when they least expected it.

Our squad was chased out of a wooded area by two tanks into a hive of attack helicopters. While we escaped through a low arroyo (ditch) we found ourselves shaking from the adrenalin rush. We were sure we would be crushed under the tank tracks or captured by the "enemy." The realism was a little too real.

SSgt. Little had "captured" a small pig that he then tried to "sell" to the Chicago Marine reservists. The combination of his broken Spanish (with a Tennessee drawl) and the pig so diverted the "invading force" that it was easy to re-direct them away from our forces and directly into an artillery and bombing range. Their commanders were not pleased. Apparently we were to be wiped out as the aggressor. It was planned that way, you see, and we changed the rules. Then and there we decided to follow Sgt. Little anywhere!

After debriefing the problem and 2 days to clean up and pack, we moved the Platoon south to Del Mar California to begin rubber boat raid training from a submarine.

By the end of May, Marines from our company were transferred to other units to fill their ranks so they can go overseas. Some of the Marines we trained with in January have already left for Okinawa and eventually to Vietnam.

30 June 1965

Del Mar

We were all 'invited' to buy a US Saving Bond for savings or Christmas gifts. We think we just paid ourselves, but wonder why we should be buying Christmas gifts this early.

11 August 1965

Pacific Ocean

We've been at sea for a day and half. We left the States at 0730A, 10 August 1965 and we're headed to the far east.

Echo Company is crammed into a cargo hold aboard a troop ship built in 1944. We seem to spend most of our time standing in chow lines. We're really crowded but at least the berthing spaces are air conditioned enough to let us breath! It occurred to us that 20 years ago almost to the day WW II ended – now we were headed back to Asia.

Last Monday night families and friends were allowed on the base. At midnight we said goodbye to our wives, kids, sweethearts, parents. Those of us who had no one were invited to share some time with the family of the Marines who did. And for the rest of us, we found out and enjoyed the free beer being handed out by the base clubs. It was a beautiful balmy night with a full moon. It seemed odd that we should be going to war then.



## Training and New Mission Photographs

### May 1965: 2nd Platoon as Aggressors in training to invade Dominican Republic

### The Pendleton SCOTT

Vol. 23, No. 19      Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, Calif.      May 21, 1965

**Training for Invasion of Dominican Republic**



## Crazy Quilt Underway; Reserves Brought In

Marine Reserves of the 24th Marines from the Chicago area and regulars of the 1st Marines concentrated on dispersing guerrilla bands May 19 as exercise "Crazy Quilt" moved ahead on schedule here.

The week-long exercise, a counter-insurgency training maneuver, got underway May 18 following an airlift from Chicago to Camp Pendleton.

The Marine Regimental Landing Team (RLT-24) which landed last Tuesday had taken control of the towns of Nesper, Cochise, Oro, DeLuz and Mateo by Wednesday night. They are now protecting American lives and property in addition to carrying out counter-insurgency maneuvers.

The training exercise is designed to teach civil affairs as well as guerrilla fighting to the Marine regular and reserve units involved.

"Crazy Quilt" will take place entirely on Camp Pendleton, where the mythical country of Fresco has been established. Fresco is a former colony of Spain, and at present, has a population of five million people.

When American lives became endangered, Morton L. Gilbert, American ambassador to Fresco, asked President Emanuel Lozata to insure protection of American nationals and property. Lozata denied the request, stating that all his available troops were on Fresco's border as a defense against an invasion by conventional forces from Olive.

Gilbert suggested that Marines be called into Fresco when Lozata was unable to provide the protection and Lozata agreed.

The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, are working with the reserve units as American forces friendly to Fresco. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 24th Marines are acting as

### August 1965: Orders to Ship Out to South-East Asia

2NDLT USMC	HEADQUARTERS	
	RLT-1	
	1st Marine Division (-) (Rein) FTF	
	Camp Pendleton, California 92055	
		3 AUG 1965
		(DATE)

CERTIFICATE IN LIEU OF ORDERS

ISENBURG, THOMAS F.      0

I certify that LCPL      0311/0000/0000      0

NAME	RANK	SERV NO/MOS	COMP PEED
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has been ordered from Camp Pendleton, California pursuant to a permanent change of station orders of Commanding General, 1st Marine Division letter 7/OFF/lds over 1320 of 2 August 1965 serial 00234-65 August 1965, which orders effect assignment to a restricted area, effective on or about August 1965. This certificate is executed under the provisions of Joint Travel Regulations, paragraph 7005, and U.S. Naval Travel Instructions, paragraph 7007. E-5 and above and all married personnel authorized 3 months advance pay. Expenditures under these orders are chargeable to appropriation MC Tvl Chg App 1761105.2753 MPMC-66 OC 21 FAN 74120 (Off tvl), 74121 (Enl Tvl) 7150 (Off), 74160 (Enl Entl) depns tvl; OC 22 FAN 74152 (Off), 74162 (Enl Entl) trans IHG; OC 12, FAN 74157 (Off)

## **DEPLOYMENT: AUGUST TO EARLY SEPTEMBER 1965**

August and September of 1965 found us training in Okinawa at Camp Hansen and at Subic Bay, Philippines. The training was a mixed bag of small unit tactics and rubber boat landings. Our first landings were in September as well.

We made assaults on the beach in Vietnam in Higgins boats from the USS Bexar, Amtraks from the USS Talladega and HH34 Helicopters from the USS Valley Forge and the USS Iwo Jima. The initial attacks were staged more for training, I think, as there was little opposition to the landings. One such landing was followed up the next day with a beer bust on the beach we had just assaulted across the day before – this was one crazy war.

On the other hand we thought Charlie was a very smart fellow. Looking back on those early landings, it must have been impressive to see the United States 7th fleet parked off the beach with 1,100 Marines and Corpsman kicking over beach chairs and landing in rice paddies – I think I would have di di (run away) to Laos too.

We made a couple of landings, one with just Echo Company tracking down some counter-insurgent forces which expanded into Operation Highland in Qui Nhon. After that we were on 6 hours deployment ready Landing Force to provide support to the landing of the 1st Air Cavalry. It was strange seeing aircraft carriers loaded with helos wrapped in white cocoons.

The Naval base at Subic Bay, Philippines and the associated town of Olangapol became our base of operations and training for most of the fall of 1965. The Battalion was arranged in tent villages on the slopes overlooking the Bay which were formerly occupied by Japanese barracks during WW2. When we arrived, the area was occupied by some very large cobras – which we chased out to make way for our shelter halves. It was called “Andersonville” after the infamous Civil War POW camp – social amenities were lacking.

We did most of our jungle training in the Philippines and learned how to forage for food, avoid the wrong food (ham and lima bean C-rations) and suffer any unpleasant animal, shark or plant encounters. We made hot rice and raisin cakes in hollowed-out bamboo cooking pots; became masters at mixing the C-ration desert specials (my favorite was the jelly and cinnamon bun sweet roll); and learned to read terrain, how to pick out sniper and ambush sites; and get acclimated to the jungle.

And of course there was Olangapol, with the Anchor and Globe bars, monkey meat jerky, ‘dance partners’; the River; Jitney buses and love. The officers went to parties at the Naval Base clubs but we had Olangapol. We had the better time. Woody and Gary worked as a team. Gary as the best looking of us would attract the ladies while Woody kept the sailors away from them - usually with me as the punching bag.

There were lady club owners who hadn't seen this many Marines and Sailors since before the Korean war. We were welcomed (and so was our money) with open arms for as long or as short a time as we could spend.

*(Author's note: It was in Olangapol that I developed a life lesson I have used in all my civilian international travel. My rule for dining with my hosts is to decline meals that: look up at you from the plate; try to crawl off the plate; or scream as you bite into them.)*

## **Deployment Letters Home**

**14 August 1965**

*Pacific*

*We now know how Charlie Tuna feels in his can – cramped. The Navy has packed our troop ship, the USS Bexar (pronounced 'bear') with everything and everyone we need to deploy. A battalion of 1200 men have been packed from stem to stern.*

*Boredom is the enemy now. We read books and try to keep the rust off of our weapons, sleep or just stare at the endless miles of ocean. We do about 15 minutes of Physical Training if we can per day. The movies haven't been too outstanding but we assume they'll get better. However, with us setting our watches back an hour every day, it just seems advisable to hit the rack than wait for a flick.*

*We have been advised that we won't be landing in Hawaii but will be refueled at sea about 100 miles north of it. We will be able to send letters home during the refueling. Our final destination remains a secret but everyone thinks it will be Okinawa, or maybe Midway.*

**21 August 1965**

*Yesterday was Thursday and today is Saturday. Without ceremony we crossed the international date line.*

*We have found out that our destination is Okinawa. We are scheduled to land in a few days. We're scheduled to stay only a short while in Okinawa before pushing on to Vietnam or as a battalion afloat off the coast.*

**29 August 65**

**Okinawa**

*It is partly cloudy and the temp is in the high 80s with 90% humidity and we got paid - all is good.*

*We anchored off "White Beach" 0600 Saturday morning. We went by bus through*

*winding mountain roads and along coral beaches, coves and lagoons to Camp Hansen.*

*The barracks are much better than what we had in Pendleton. Each fire team (4 men) has a cubicle with a desk, chair, two bunks, two fans, etc. Each billet houses two platoons plus the head.*

*Last night we went to a brand new enlisted club. They have slot machines; a band to dance to; nice girls to dance with and a floor show every night.*

*The prices in the PX are very low. A \$400.00 Akai Tape recorder bought in the States sells here for \$120.00! Most of us bought cameras and started snapping pictures of everything and everyone.*

*We compressed a month of training into 10 days. Boat training off the beach, hikes into the Island and re-qualifying on the weapons range with all types of weapons. We will be off the coast of Vietnam by the middle of September.*

*Our Raid company for this RLT (regimental landing team) we'll be making some practice raids up and down the coast of Vietnam for most the rest of the year. We are beginning to understand the reason for the specialized training we got in Pendleton. We will conduct "search and destroy" and "snatch and grab" operations. Maps are issued, but some of the maps are printed in French language. We decided to make our own maps rather than waste time figuring out the French prepared maps.*

*6 September 65*

*South Pacific*

*We are back aboard ship making a slow 5 day trip to station ourselves off the Vietnam Coast to support an Army operation scheduled for 11 September. We are told that the Army has created the first helicopter infantry – called the First Air Cavalry. Rumor has it that one of the units being landed on the 11th is numbered the "7th Cavalry."*

(Author's note: The 7th AirCav was surrounded and nearly wiped out two months later – almost a repeat of General Armstrong Custer's massacre at Little Big Horn. We were diverted from our Dagger Thrust IV raid to pressure the Viet Cong from the rear during that operation)

*16 September 65*

*Qui Nhan Bay, Republic of Vietnam*

*The coast of Vietnam is a ¼ mile away. We have been in the bay for two days waiting for the Air Cavalry to arrive.*

*This bay we're in is very large and it is holding a lot of our ships easily with thousands of fishing boats, we call LBGBs (Little Bitty Gut Boats).*

*Mountains, thick with jungle and steep beaches with coral make up three sides of the bay. The village of Qui Nang is fairly large and sits in a valley on the largest beach.*

*The only evidence there is a war going on is the military ships and planes and armed guards on deck watch. The fishing boats look harmless but one might be loaded to blow up our ships so we take no chances and don't let them near the ships.*

*It seemed like 120 degrees today with humidity near 90% but a light breeze made it bearable.*

19 September 65

Qui Nhan

*We transferred from our ships to the mainland (25 miles inland). We relieved a platoon on a hill in a defensive perimeter so they could go on patrol in the valley and villages below us. They haven't encountered any VC for about a month on this hill but just the same it had to be guarded because it overlooked the Command Post, our supply and Army depots.*

*It has been misty for the past few days as the rainy season moves in so those nights we stood watch a VC would have to be right on top of us to see him.*

*The countryside is hilly with coral and cinder shale rocks, a lot of green and palm trees go on the slopes. The valleys are almost all rice fields mingled with rivers and jungles.*

*We will be moving south to pull a few raids with a detour to Subic Bay, Philippines October 10 or 11 to change ships and probably more training.*

28 September 65

Qui Nhan

*The entire Battalion made a landing this week. We hit the beach in Higgins boats and Amtraks (metal troop carriers) while the other company's helo lifted to surround two villages and four hills suspected of housing major VC units. The temp was at least 110 degrees and the humidity felt close to it. The ground was sandy and covered with sharp rocks and bramble bushes.*

*We made the mistake of taking everything with us, including sleeping bags and utility jackets. The excessive weight combined with the lack of food or water for 18 hours the first day and 8 hrs the second day caused us to lose a few men to heat stroke.*

*The landing was unopposed but overnight scattered firefights were started as we found VC trying to sneak through our lines.*

*When we patrolled through the villages we passed out medical aid, candy and smokes. We found ourselves being lectured by the village elders who supported the local Viet Cong. They remembered what the Japanese told them about Americans. "American Marines are killers and murderers" – old WW II propaganda has survived for 20 years. Hopefully the care we demonstrated in the villages will begin to change their minds about us.*

## Deployment Photographs

**September 1965: Camp Hansen, Okinawa**



**September 1965: Camp Hansen, Echo briefing**





**September 1965: Camp Hansen, Physical Training (PT)**



**September 1965: Camp Hansen, 2nd Platoon, First Squad**



**September 1965: Company Echo Rubber Boat Training Headquarters, Okinawa**



**September 1965: Ready for March (Corporal Hicks)**





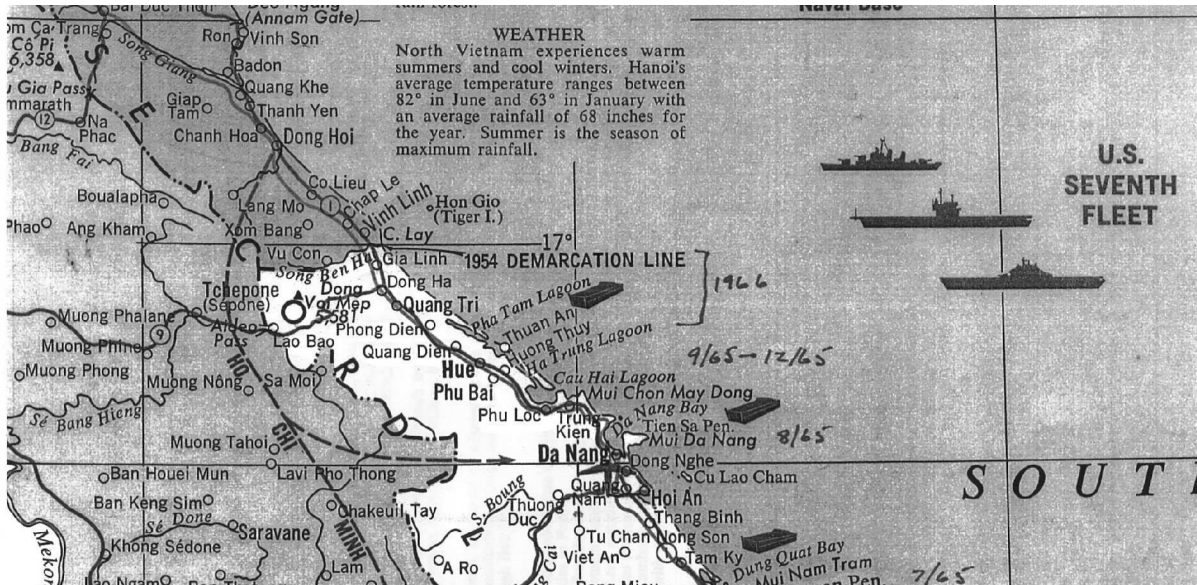
**September 1965: USS Bexar on horizon**



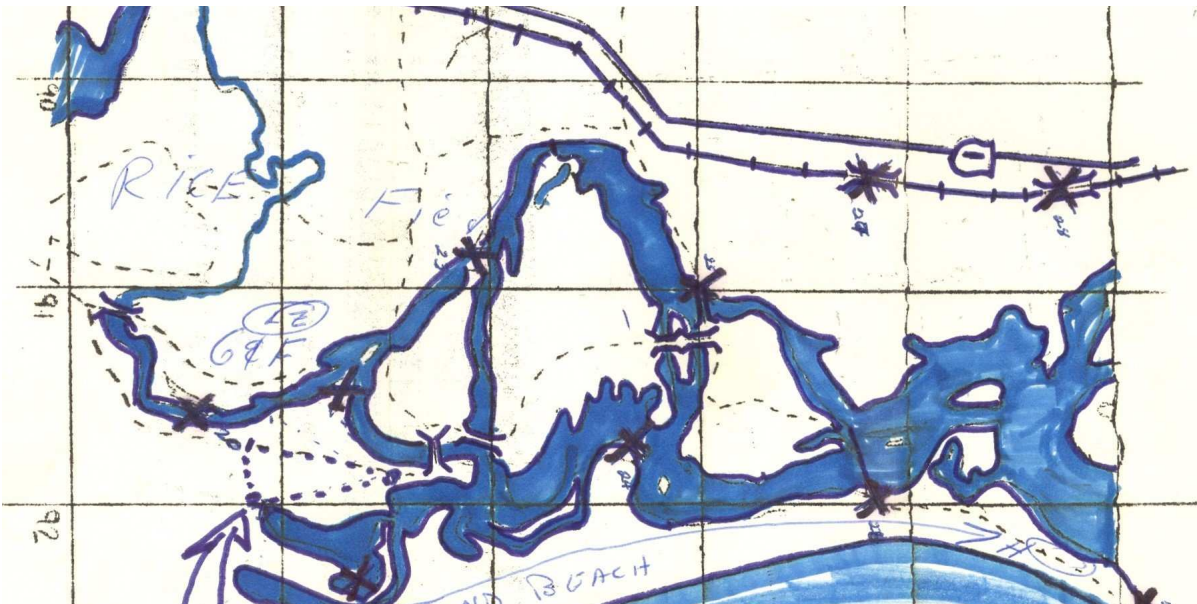
**September 1965: Cpl David Reyner, First Fire Team Leader at rifle range**



## September 1965: Conflict Map of Vietnam



## September 1965: Handwritten map for Dagger Thrust I raid



**September 1965: Rubber Boat Training**



**September 1965: Boats on the Beach, Okinawa**



**September 1965: Dagger Thrust II Hon Lou**



**September 1965: USS Talladega APA 208**





## September 1965: USS Iwo Jima



## September 1965: Changing Times...



**September 1965: President Hoover on "The Nature of Liberty"**

Herbert Hoover pointed out that "liberty is a thing of the spirit--to be free to worship, to think, to hold opinions, and to speak without fear--free to challenge wrong and oppression with surety of justice."

He said, "Liberty conceives that the mind and spirit of men can be free only if the individual is free to choose his own calling, to develop his talents, to win and to keep a home sacred from intrusion, to rear children in ordered security."

Freedom is a delicate flower, easily crushed. Its seeds, however, are abundant and hardy. They try to germinate in every kind of soil.

**September 1965: Cartoons from Stars and Stripes**





**September 1965: Operation Highlands**



**September 1965: Que Nhon Hill, Operation Highland, First Squad**



**September 1965: Que Nhon River, Operation Highland**



**September 1965: Amtrak**





**September 1965: Dave Reyner, Operation Highland**



**September 1965: Beach Landing from APA Montrose**



## **LATE SEPTEMBER THROUGH DECEMBER:**

### **OPERATIONS DAGGER THRUST AND HARVEST MOON**

We conducted four of a planned seven raids known as Dagger Thrust up and down the coast of Vietnam . While the landings were Battalion-sized we would disperse along the coast and inland with platoon-sized patrols checking out villages and suspected VC command bunkers and caves. Sometimes we would invite the village elders to meet with us and other times we provided medical aid to the villagers. Occasionally we walked into a few fire fights.

Steve "Doc" Byars, the Company Corpsman, joined the platoon and then stayed with us for the duration. His tireless devotion to us, keeping us repaired, or just keeping us out of certain establishments is a credit to his service. Unfortunately he was too busy. He was and is the most "Marine" Sailor I have ever had the privilege of serving with. I watched him repeatedly move in harm's way to keep us out of harm's way. Thanks, Doc.

Dagger Thrust I was in the Vung Mu peninsula on September 25. Dagger Thrust II was on Hon Lou Island on October 1. We made both landings from Higgins boats going over the side in nets from the USS Montrose APA212.

Dagger Thrust III was down the Mu Gia river in Tam Quan on October 10. We took a break and became a floating reserve for Operation Blue Marlin being conducted by the 5th Marines somewhere south of Chu Lai. We liberated villagers hidden in a train tunnel by the VC and used air and naval gunfire to eliminate the VC threat.

We had a beach landing for a beer bust on the Marine Corps birthday, November 10, 1965

We were pulled off the beach and sailed south to be ready to evacuate American citizens and other non-combatants fleeing Indonesia as Communist forces advanced on Jakarta, the capital. We showed the flag, the indigenous forces did their job and the world was safe from one communist take-over.

We went back to work with split operations by companies paired off for landings by air or sea some 30 or 40 miles apart. These were attacks into villages along the coast and a few miles inland to search out VC training and support areas. What was interesting is that the Dagger Thrust IV landing was made with some success just 70 miles east of Saigon. It was the first and only time the Battalion ventured that far south.

Midway through the raid we were pulled back north to act as a blocking force for an Army Air Cavalry unit trying to fight its way out of being surrounded and outnumbered. We landed by Air (HMM-261 as I recall) and sea at Lang Ke Ga at Kega Point (Bihn Thuan province – III Corps area) with the other companies landing 17 miles north at Phan Thiet. We moved north and south to link up in a river valley. We disrupted a number of VC and broke up their encampments. We were briefed later on the purpose of the mission. The reports of valor by the Air Cav unit were impressive. We learned a lot from their ordeal.

Dagger Thrust V landing was made on November 30 into Phu Thu Village (Quan Phu My province). We took no prisoners or fire except from a single VC who let go his one issued magazine of ammunition at some dumb jarhead with an bright orange air panel on his helmet (as ordered by a certain platoon commander). Dagger Thrust raids VI and VII were cancelled. We never found out where we were to land for those last raids but we had unpacked the rubber boats and scuttlebutt about the raids gave us the impression we would be going north for those last two raids.

On December 8 we were transferred to the USS Valley Forge and were briefed on a helicopter assault scheduled for 9 December in support of “Task Force Delta” consisting of our 2/1, and elements of 2/7, 3/3 and 3 Army Republic of VietNam (ARVN) Battalions which became known as Operation “Harvest Moon.” Echo moved to positions south of Tam Ky in the Phouc Ha Valley after the first B52 raids. Patrols into 500lb bomb craters filled with animal and human parts was our first introduction to what it must have been like for Soldiers and Marines in World War II. The devastation was total and we could feel the compression waves from the bombs three miles away.

There has been much written on this operation but little on the role of 2/1. We were being called the ghost battalion because our role didn’t appear to amount to much in the official reports of the battle. From my perspective, the cold wet weather, leeches, B52 raids, fire fights, losses for Golf, Fox and Echo in major ambushes confirmed that the Marines and Corpsmen of 2/1 made their mark. We lost a lot of friends over those 10 days. We also learned to operate in smaller units with limited food and supplies to fight effectively and survive. We marched out on 19 December 1965 a lot smarter, a lot smaller, but more determined than we had been before.

We have never been as cold or hungry as we were during that Operation Harvest Moon, nor more appreciative of our Corpsman and Fleet sailors. Their care, support and welcome back aboard ship after Harvest Moon was tireless and gratefully received.

## **Late September to Operation Harvest Moon Letters Home**

4 October 65

### *Off the Coast*

*We have made more raids into beach villages and inland rivers from Chu Lai to the Demilitarized zone separating South from North Vietnam.*

*As we became surer of our jobs and assignments, we began to separate into smaller units to "invite" the VC to fight. We deliberately moved into open fields and on to well-defined trails while other units moved through the jungles around us. It's a weird feeling to know that as we're walking along rice paddy dikes, a machine gun could open up.*

*Most of the first and second days were filled with hit and run ambushes until we reached our objective, a hill overlooking a railroad tunnel and Highway 1 where a large number of VC ran into the tunnel. The firefight with them went on most of the day, until we could get close enough to use grenades to flush the VC out of the tunnel. This was our first experience at close-in fighting.*

*First platoon was stationed at the opposite end of the tunnel and was able to kill the escaping VC from our frontal attack. We entered the tunnel to finish up the attack and sweep for any wounded or hiding VC. To our surprise we found over 200 men, women and children hidden behind a rock barrier mid way. The VC had moved from their village. We found out that they were to be killed for being sympathetic to the South Vietnam government. We became more resolved to see an end to the VC.*

*That afternoon there was sporadic gun fire as we began to surround the VC units and drive them toward a valley near a small hill. We pulled up on high ground positions to insure that the VC would not be able to escape. We called in air strikes to finish the job.*

*That night we watched the valley and a small peninsula leveled by an air strike. All night long, flares went off and rockets, machine gun fire and bombs did the job. After awhile the whole area was ablaze and at times it seemed like day.*

*Our one combat casualty was a staff sergeant who lost an eye due to shrapnel that landed next to his position.*

*We were authorized an additional \$65.00 per month for "combat pay." Enlisted Marines could count on as much as \$160 per month base pay. The extra \$65.00 was a great bonus.*

*We started numbering our Raids. This was Dagger Thrust 3.*

24 October 65

*Subic Bay, Philippines*

*We landed in the Philippines the 11th and spent the first two days unloading ship. We transferred off the Talladega to the USS Montrose, another kind of troop ship, and released to take time off – Liberty Call.*

*There's a town (practically all bars) just outside the Subic Bay gate called Olangapo which we visited quite a lot. The Philipinos love to have fun. Wine, women and song was what we needed. We enjoyed our rest.*

*Other than a few nature hikes, we got a lot of rest. While we trained, the rest of the battalion and ships' crews moved the battalion ashore to set up a tent city called "Liberty." We called it "Andersonville" after the Civil War POW camp.*

*Approximately 1700 men live in tents on the side of this long hill overlooking Subic Bay. We have field mess tents, showers, heads, movies and a beer tent. It's a self supporting city with transportation to the gate and our own mail box. It's a very impressive sight.*

8 November 65

*Vietnam*

*We're off the coast of Vietnam again and the rainy season is upon us. Rain, rain, rain. All night, all day nothing but rain. And not just showers but torrents.*

*We got mail before we left Subic Bay. Some of us got "care packages" full of extra socks, rain gear, cookies and newspapers from back home. We plan to share our gifts during the Marine Corps birthday in two days.*

*Some of us also started getting letters from our local Legislator, Mayor or Congressman. They are asking questions about the fighting and our morale and telling us that the country is supporting our fight. We wonder why we are getting all this attention. Mostly, we like to read about how well our local sports teams are doing and we are very proud reading about the Gemini space flights and the plan to go to the moon in a couple of years.*

*Our orders have been extended to a 13 month tour of duty back-dated to August 1965. We are told that we will be transferred back to the States at the end of our tour. It's too far into the future to consider what these orders mean now.*

*We met with the Chaplain to make a new will. We are encouraged to send our paychecks home as US dollars are not authorized for use in country. RVN "scrip" will be issued for our use. We think we will be leaving our ships for a tent on the mainland very soon. We set up joint bank accounts with our families and we are encouraged to "Buy Bonds."*

*We are issued a \$10,000 life insurance policy that only costs us \$1.50 per month.<sup>23</sup>*

November 65

*Philippines*

*Our last visit to the Philippines is spent in Manila Bay. We are humbled by sights of Corregidor and Bataan. We march in a parade and enjoy the "big city." The people welcome us. Some of the older ones reminisce about the last time American soldiers and Marines were in Manila to liberate the country during World War II. We are surprised at the patriotism and love of America. We are proud to represent our Country.*

*Thanksgiving is prepared by the Navy aboard ship. Real turkey with all the fixings.*

6 December 65

*Coast of Vietnam*

*Since leaving Manila we have stepped up the "Dagger Thrust" raids but this time we try to capture as many VC leaders as we can.*

*The first raid was south of Chu Lai and was fairly quiet with just some small arms and sniper fire. However, we got off the beach just before Typhoon Fay hit the coast. For the rest of the week our small ship felt like it would break up; at times enormous waves covered it. We had a few casualties but they were from short guys falling out of their racks. It wasn't uncommon to hear a thud intermingled with some profound words during the night.*

*The third raid was pulled north of Qui Nhon and what was supposed to be an overnight operation turned into 4 day mission. Our job was to search a village (pretty well bombed out, unoccupied) and surrounding area for VC and arms hideouts. We found a number of hooches (native huts) intertwined in the thick undergrowth and jungle surrounding the area. The huts had tables, food, clothes, ammo etc. It is believed that the site housed North Vietnamese regulars. When we left our area engineers blew it up*

*Our final Dagger Thrust raid ended on December 5th. We were able to surprise the VC this time in close-in fighting, sometimes moving into each others lines without knowing it. When we moved back to ship we left 62 VC dead; and captured 97 VC. We had 14 wounded and 2 dead. We used everything from small arms, to artillery to Naval guns to air strikes and bagged 2 VC companies.*

10 December 65  
Coast of Vietnam,

*This is a poem written by a group of Marines over here. We are surprised and angered by the anti-war demonstrations we read about from home. Please give the poem to our friends and relatives as a response to the demonstrators. We are beginning to feel that we are the only people who know why we have to win in Vietnam – to insure that former President Kennedy's legacy of stopping the spread of Communism.*

WHO IS HE?

YOU SIT AT HOME AND WATCH TV. YOU'RE SIPPING REFRESHING COLD ICED TEA. THE NEWS COMES ON AND THEN YOU HEAR, THE ALLSTAR GAME IS DRAWING NEAR.

THEN YOU SEE A FAR OFF LAND, WHERE MEN ARE DYING ON THE SAND. A FROWN APPEARS ACROSS YOUR FACE, YOU'RE TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT THAT PLACE. WHO CARES ABOUT VIETNAM ACROSS THE SEA?

IT'S FAR AWAY AND DOESN'T CONCERN ME. YOU'D RATHER HEAR THE BEATLES PLAY, THAN HEAR ABOUT THE WORLD TODAY.

BUT STOP AND THINK FOR A MOMENT OR TWO, AND ASK YOURSELF, "DOES THIS CONCERN YOU?" IT'S GREAT TO BE ALIVE AND FREE, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE GUY ACROSS THE SEA? HE'S GIVING UP HIS LIFE FOR ME, SO THAT I CAN LIVE UNDER LIBERTY.

HE'S FAR AWAY FIGHTING A WAR, INSTEAD OF FIGHTING AT MY FRONT DOOR. THIS GUY WHO LIVES IN FILTH AND SLIME, HOW CAN HE DO IT ALL THE TIME? HE'S ABOUT MY AGE SO WHY SHOULD HE CARE, ABOUT A WAR SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD SHARE. YOU CALL HIM VILE NAMES AND MAKE FUN

OF HIS CAUSE, YOU LUCKY GUY, YOU LAUGH AND SNEER, BECAUSE YOU'VE NEVER REALLY KNOWN FEAR. THIS YOUNG MAN FACES DEATH EACH DAY, BUT HE ALWAYS HAS SOMETHING FUNNY TO SAY. NO MAIL AGAIN? A TWINGE OF SORROW. OH, WHAT THE HELL – THERE'S ALWAYS TOMORROW

THE MORALE IS LOW, THE TENSION IS HIGH. SOME EVEN BREAK DOWN AND CRY. HE WANTS TO GO HOME AND SEE A LOVED ONE. HE WORKS ALL DAY AND STANDS GUARD ALL NIGHT. HE'S TIRED AND SICK BUT HE CONTINUES TO FIGHT.

THE COLLEGE CROWD THINKS HE'S A FOOL, BUT THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM HARD AND CRUEL. YOU DON'T APPRECIATE WHAT HE'LL DO, LIKE GIVING UP HIS LIFE FOR YOU. HE SACRIFICES MUCH YET ASKS NOTHING IN RETURN, JUST SO YOU CAN STAY IN SCHOOL AND LEARN. HE BELIEVES IN FREEDOM AND THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE. NO PARTIES OR DANCES FOR THIS YOUNG MAN, UNTIL HE COMES BACK AGAIN.

THE DAYS ARE HOT AND THE NIGHTS ARE TOO, WHAT WONDERS A COLD CAN OF BEER CAN DO. HE THINKS OF COLD BEER AND A THICK JUICY STEAK, WHEN SOMEONE SHOUTS "WE'VE GOT A HILL TO TAKE." SOME WILL BE HEROES BECAUSE THEY ARE BRAVE, AND OTHERS WILL GET A WREATH ON THEIR GRAVE

YOU'LL RECOGNIZE HIM AS HE WALKS BY. THERE'S A SADDENED LOOK IN HIS EYE. HE WALKS PROUD YET LOOKS SO MEAN, HE'S CALLED THE "WORLDS GREATEST FIGHTING MACHINE." HE'S A UNITED STATES MARINE.

Anonymous



12 December 65

Vietnam

*Echo Company and the rest of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines was flown inland on the second day of Operation Harvest Moon. We joined up with units from the 7th and 3rd Marines to attack 2 regiments of North Vietnamese regulars who had wiped out 1000 ARVN troops (Army of South Vietnam).*

*2/7 is from Chu Lai and 2/3 from DaNang. We landed from the US Ships Montrose, Valley Forge and Monticello which were taking us up to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) for another Dagger Thrust Raid.*

*We landed by chopper 22 miles inland. Fox company landed right in the middle of North Vietnamese and had to fight its way out of the rice paddies. They got hit pretty bad. When we landed we came under sniper fire.*

*We were there eight days – it rained all eight – we fought off and on all eight days. We slept in rice paddies and every time there was a break in the fighting we'd pick the leaches off.*

*We covered over 100 miles in those eight days. You were never dry. After the fourth day we took no prisoners. Nobody came out without something wrong. They even dropped 500 pound bombs from B52s into this valley. We had to move 3 miles away but could still feel the rush of air from the explosions. The holes in that soft ground were huge, maybe 50 feet wide.*

*When we came back to the ship we were met by a month's worth of mail and pay and our first hot meals in three weeks. The meals were cooked to order by the Navy. We were repaired by the Corpsman or transferred to DaNang for hospitalization as needed.*

*We sent Christmas cards; cleaned our gear and are waiting for orders.*

*23 December 65*

*Coast of Vietnam*

*The Chaplain dropped by with letters and cards from "mail call USA." The system started in Pennsylvania to send cards to us from the girls there. The letters are from people of all ages. It's nice to know so many people care.*

*We have no way of buying and sending Christmas gifts but we find that pictures sent home seem to be an okay substitute. Merry Christmas. The unit is being sent to Phu Bai, a town located in the northern part of South Vietnam, for land duty. The Raids are over.*

*31 December 65*

*Phu Bai, Vietnam*

*Happy 1966. We are off tonight and have been told that beer has been sent for us to drink. It is the first drink we have had since leaving the Philippines. Our "Club" is a small metal container used to ship supplies.*

*It feels like it's cold enough to snow. It rains constantly. We are issued sleeping bags to keep us warm at night. Very strange. We listen to the new radio station playing music and news from Saigon. The DJ is very funny. We wonder what team won the Rose Bowl.*

**Late September Through December Photographs**

**October 01, 1965: Dagger Thrust III TamQuan Province, Red Beach**



**October 1965: Phu Mao River, Dagger Thrust III**



**October 1965: Battalion Beer Bust**



**October 1965: Dagger Thrust III Down the Nets**



**October 1965: Dagger Thrust III 2nd Platoon down into the boats**



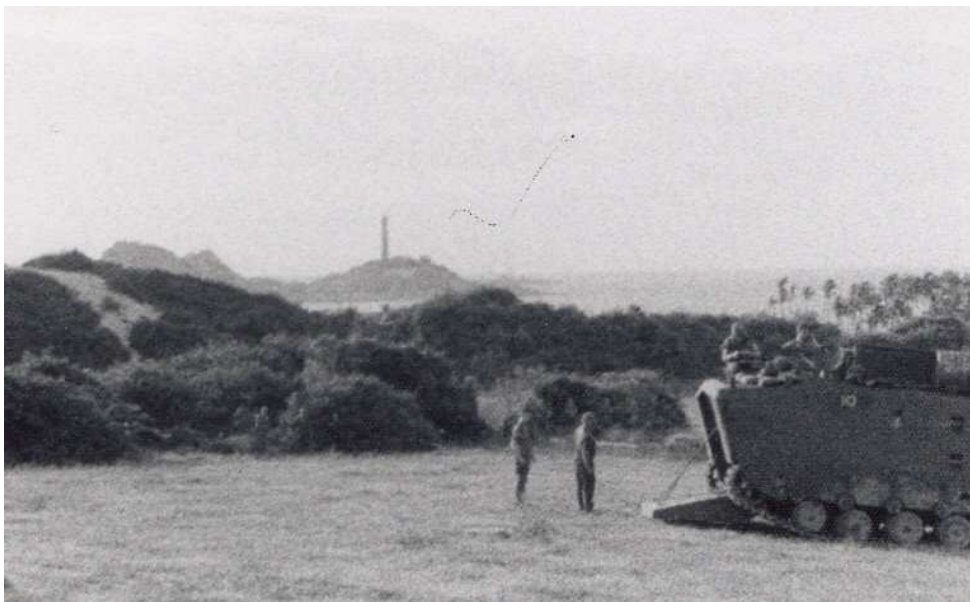
**October 1965: Company Echo Radio in Higgins Boat – Dagger Thrust III**



**October 1965: Lt Pickersgill and point in Tam Quan village, Dagger Thrust III**



**November 1965: Dagger Thrust IV at Kega Point**





**November 1965: Duc Nho, Dagger Thrust IV after air strike**



**November 1965: Dust Bowl Hill, Dagger Thrust IV**



**November 1965: Doc Slayter with rice cutter, Dagger Thrust IV**



**November 1965: VC Training Camp – Kitchen, Dagger Thrust IV**



**November 1965: VC Training Camp – Food Stores**

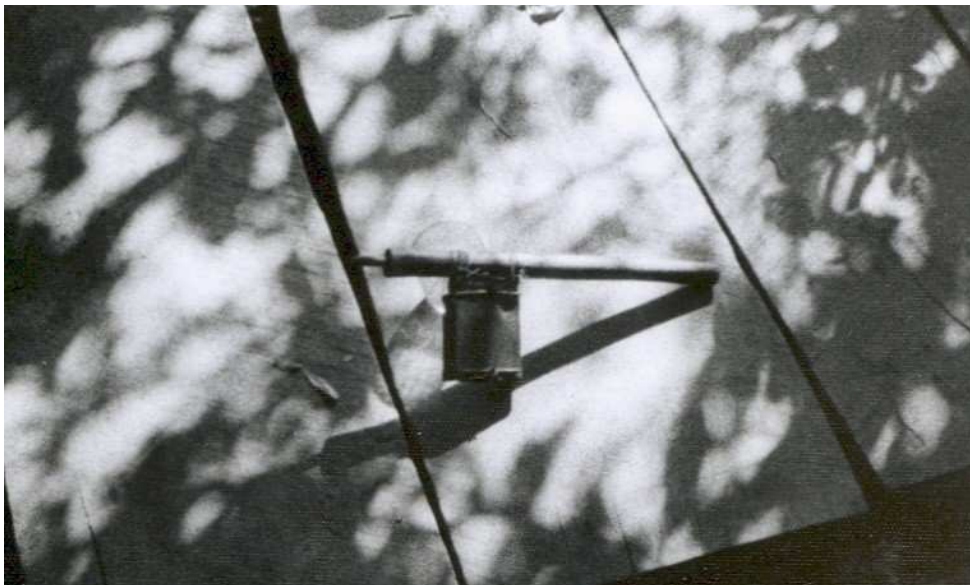


**November 1965: VC Training Camp – Uniforms, Dagger Thrust IV**





**November 1965: VC Training Camp – 22Cal – Bamboo and C-Ration Zip Gun**



**November 1965: DaNang**



**November 1965: Bataan, Philippines**



**November 1965: Corrigador, PI**



**November 1965: “Anderson Vill”, Subic Bay, PI**



**November 1965: “Anderson Vill” 2/1 CP**





**November 1965: Subic Bay, Philippines**



**November 1965: Echo Company, 2nd Platoon CP at Anderson Vill**



**November 1965: Olangapol, Philippines**



**November 1965: Fishing Boats on the beach at Philippines (PI)**



**November 1965: 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon, Echo aboard Talladega**

L to R: Walley, “Mandrake” Manning, “NumbNorm” Eddy, “Ike” Isenburg, “Mouse” Allman, “Eddie” Wells, “Woody” Woods.



**December 1965: Operation Harvest Moon - back trail**





**December 1965: Operation Harvest Moon lower village**



**December 1965: KobiThanTan Valley – Operation Harvest Moon**



**December 1965: Operation Harvest Moon, upper Village after B52 Strike**



**December 1965: Upper Village and Valley**



**December 1965: Operation Harvest Moon – End of Mission**





**December 1965: Christmas Card from Operation "Mail Call Vietnam"**

I am a Pennsylvania high school student, writing this to you, hoping it will bring a few minutes of good cheer.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a wonderfully happy New Year.

God Bless  
you,

Rosemary

May the peace of  
Christmas  
bring happiness to you  
all through  
the coming year

Rosemary  
Rok

15902

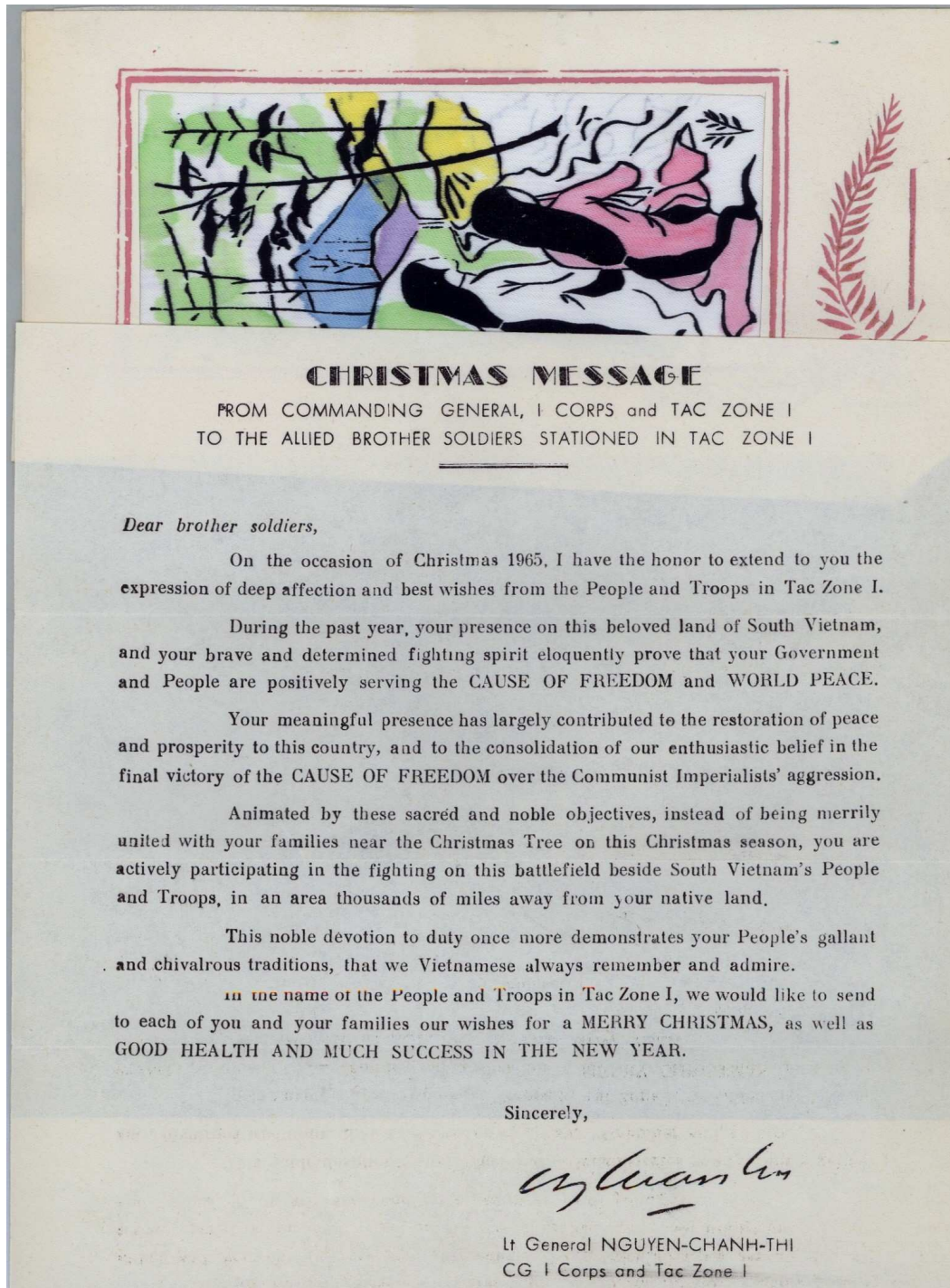


GIVE  
THE  
UNITED  
WAY



Mail Call Vietnam  
P.O. Box 450  
Bryn Mawr, Pa.

## December 1965: General Kao Ki Christmas Greetings at Naval Hospital, DaNang



**JANUARY TO JULY 1966:****PHU BAI, HUE, DONG HA, ROCKPILE AND THE DMZ**

The Battalion took up residence at Phu Bai from 3rd Battalion / 4th Marines who replaced us as the Landing Force. We were now recognized as a unit in country. We built the unit compound with hard-side tent barracks, mess hall and landing pad away from the runway. We surrounded the place with bunkers, fox and spider holes and concertina wire to protect the airfield and an Army listening post. Some of us who had accommodations at the DaNang Naval hospital and missed most of the move arrived just in time to re-arrange the tent city and stand a post on Hill 225.

We were presented with awards and promotions for the Dagger Thrust raids and Operation Harvest Moon. Someone gave us a plaque to recognize the deployment but we noticed that the snow capped mountain pictured in the plaque suggested to us that this was a deployment sign for a past 2/1 that stopped off in Japan. Still the picture looked great and was embroidered into uniform carrying bags for purchase at the local HoChi store and barber shop.

Our NCOs and officers were transferred to fill out the ranks of Golf and Fox companies and other units. Staff Sergeants became Platoon commanders and Lance Corporals became squad leaders. We changed all of our M-14s to automatic, and added shotguns and .45 cal side arms to our personal arsenals. Carrying extra ammo, grenades, socks and food was never a problem after Harvest Moon. Platoons were balanced out at about 35 with four squads of 7 to 8 Marines in each squad, a Corpsman and 2 or 3 souls from Weapons platoon rounding out the unit.

We conducted squad-size patrols and night ambushes while at Phu Bai. Occasionally we would run patrols around the refugee camps to our north to keep Charles from scaring the hell out of the natives and we began to live in the surrounding villages in support of the “pacification program” of winning hearts and minds. We were also introduced to the new rule of engagement – ‘don’t fire unless you are fired upon’ which did much to aid and comfort the enemy.

Sniper fire and small skirmishes were the norm during our Phu Bai deployment. Sometimes we would be sent to patrol along the DMZ and in river valleys near the western border of Vietnam to stretch our legs while looking for some action.

A nasty rumor was started about this time that 2nd platoon had shot a water buffalo and paid off the offended villager in scrip. Seems the water buffalo was approaching the platoon in a menacing manner. We were also accused of offering snakes for sale to the village ladies who were already scared of us. We are sure all of these stories were fabricated by our enemies.

Our mail caught up with us on one of those extended patrols. One of the packages we got was from Alameda High School, Alameda, California. The senior class adopted us. We sent a picture of us holding the citation to the school as a thank you. Those who had birthdays and loving girl friends (and future wives) got special packages containing a birthday cake with a bottle of vodka inside.

From February to April the Platoon was split up with some of us becoming village people. Formed into the newly named Combined Action Companies, we settled in with local Popular Forces Platoons giving aid and training. For our Corpsman, an almost constant stream of happy, healthy children and adoring mothers kept them busy.

Sadly, one of “our villages” was being scheduled for demolition as it lay across a main staging trail expected to be used by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to bring in supplies. We had spent a few weeks working alongside the villagers to prepare their fields for planting and had the privilege of being invited to a wedding. It broke my heart to tell the village elders that they had to give up their home where generations of families lay in rest. The platoon, with support from the motor pool, helped them pack up their homes and their dead for transport to a “refugee camp” located 25 Kilometers away. We thought this could happen state-side if we lost this war. The villagers were accepting, even appreciative of our help and care. We thought what wonderfully strong people we are helping to defend. This was the worst day of the war for us. We were very proud of Lt. Pick for deciding to help the villagers.

On the way back to Phu Bai, 2nd platoon conducted patrols in a number of isolated valleys, including a horseshoe shaped place with a small hill in the center surrounded by a range of mountains. We met with and provided support for a group of US Special Forces soldiers who

were surveying the area. We pitched poncho tents and spent a week in Khe Sanh just down highway 9 from an old French fort that the Special Forces unit had just vacated.

Back at Phu Bai we were being split up to move into local villages and refugee camps as part of the I-Corps Joint Action Company program. We were treated to USO shows from Big Tiny Little; and from Ann Margret. When Ann Margret sang it was if she was singing to each one of us. The fact that she and her troop traveled to this sand spit made us her number one fans. It was one of our happy times

We also traveled north to Hue City after the main railroad bridge across the River of Perfumes was blown up. Hue was to have been kept as an open city – no combatants allowed thank you. The ancient capital was a combination of Asian and French architecture. Most everyone spoke French and attended Jesuit schools. If you wanted to enjoy yourself you needed to practice your French. The people were friendly and welcomed us to their city. For all we knew we were visiting with NVA and VC each time we went to town.

We traveled to Hue in 6-bys in civilian clothes and unarmed. Yep. Civilian clothes and unarmed! Looking back on what happened in Hue during TeT 1968, I can't help but wonder what happened to those teachers, school children and 'friends' who invited us into their city.

Operation New York was conducted near the end of March and was one of our most violent, with VC contact almost constant from landing to extraction. It was our first night landing. 2nd platoon was the ready force the day we were launched to aid our sister ARVN battalion a few miles northeast of Phu Bai. Charlie was dug in and wanted to fight. The operation lasted about a week, ending on April 3rd.

After we filled the latrines in Phu Bai, new tactical orders were cut to disperse the Battalions into platoon-sized enclaves north of Hue. 2nd Platoon, Echo Company won the former girls school at Dong Ha as our base of operations for patrols along the DMZ and into the area with a large rock hill we called the RockPile. Most of our patrols were to set ambushes coordinated with artillery and air to block supplies moving into the northwestern corner of South Vietnam. A Corpsman and a squad from the platoon would also hang out at a suspected VC or NVA sympathetic village along the rivers in that area as part of the 'winning minds' program.



Companies and platoons ran a series of operations to draw out our friends. Known as Operations Beaver, Florida and Jay, we would work in concert with elements of 4th Marines and surround our friends where we could. If we weren't on the operation we were supplying protection to fire base

We lost Lt Doug Pickersgill twice - once when we thought he was wounded in June; and, then when he was ordered south for saving "our village." We lost track of him and a few weeks later we got a rumor that he had been killed. We were without the Platoon Commander who had trained us and led us into fights. He was one of the bravest men we have known. Years later we found out that his first wedding anniversary was the day before we shipped out in August 1965. We didn't know he was married. We were very angry about the loss of our first and only Platoon Commander and we wanted revenge. But SSgt Little took over the platoon and quickly kept us focused on our job.

We had some good success in late spring and early summer, losing only a few of our comrades. By mid-summer we were getting new replacements and taking on Battalion sized missions where we got hurt but gave back in equal measure.

Operation Hastings was probably the worst of those missions, mainly because we were half our strength and making another night assault. And this time we faced North Vietnamese regulars who knew we were coming.

We landed near Cam Lo just south of Hwy 9 and moved along the Suoi Then Hien River (The Ear). This was our first experience with our own heavy artillery, "Puff" gun ships (C130 cargo planes firing large caliber guns) and the NVA mortars and rockets. Our patrols and NVA patrols would meet on the same trails – and nobody backed down. Action was almost constant from July 15 to August 3. We had an enemy who wanted to fight and we wanted to oblige him. The savagery of it was satisfying. We got even for all of those brothers we had lost over the last year.

Operation Hastings hurt 2nd platoon. We lost most of the Marines who deployed with us the year before, including our Platoon Sergeant SSgt Jim Little and two of my good friends, including my birthday brother, Gary Ford.



Gary was hit by shrapnel in the head and back trying to recover his men who were in front of the lines. Doc tried everything to save him, including stuffing grass in his open wounds to stop the bleeding. I held Gary waiting for the chopper to take him away.

Sgt Little's legs were shattered so badly we didn't think he would walk again. I tracked him down a couple of years later to find that the Navy doctors had wired him up enough to return him to active duty, first as a Recruiter in wheel chair and then leading Marines into the Mediterranean where he aggravated his old wounds and returned to the States. He too, was one of the bravest men I knew. He could still scare the hell out of me years after we served. Likewise, Gary survived his wounds, married his high school sweetheart and leads a happy and productive life. He is my hero.

The rest of the platoon, and for that matter Echo Company, was a collection of walking wounded with phosphorus burns, shrapnel wounds, malaria and dysentery. On August 6, Echo Company was relieved of duty and declared non-effective combatants (whatever that meant). Even with the outstanding replacements who joined us over the last three months, we only had 16 souls in the platoon – it was time to rest and re-group.

On August 8, 1966 2nd Platoon, Echo Company was pulled off the line and shipped to DaNang, almost 12 months to the day since leaving the States

## **January to July: Phu Bai and the RockPile Letters Home**

*10 January 66*

*Phu Bai*

*During the day we work on the perimeter and run patrols. At night we man the perimeter and run patrols. We are bored.*

*Phu Bai is a system of villages in the province of Phong Trung. The city of Hue is here and the North and South Viets hold it sacred. It was the one-time Imperial capital of all Vietnam.*

*We place squads in a few tactical villages to refuse the VC access to harvested grain or rice. We like to think that in return the villagers will spy against the VC and give us information as to their whereabouts. We would like to think that they will do this, but we know they won't. Still village assignments or "CAPs" – combined action platoon – are a nice break from the boredom of being back at the Phu Bai enclave.*

*We are witness to the Vietnamese New Year – "TeT" which means Happy New Spring. It is the big holiday that seems to mean more to these people than our own New Year celebration. They have many superstitions and customs which are very colorful and mysterious. Sharing the festivities in the local villages was a lot of fun, even under the threat of anti-US demonstrations and attacks*

*11 January 66*

*Rock Pile*

*We've moved to a hill north of Hue (outpost overlooking 17th parallel). We finally have a chance to relax – only one patrol per day. We build our own hooches and bunkers and flank the area with rock trenches*

*25 January 1966*

*Near the DMZ*

*We were going along a trail through dense underbrush when incoming rounds started cutting through the bushes around us.*

*We got a call on the radio from the Command Post that the ARVNs (South Viet Army) were on our left across the river (4 miles on the other side of the river is the 17th*

parallel – border with North Vietnam) and to be careful if we should fire in that direction. It came over the radio like this: "Be advised that ARVNs are across the river to your left. Do not fire on them." We called back 'we know they are there, would you inform them that we are here and to stop shooting at us!' They said "From which direction are the rounds coming?" We said 'to our left, across the river and going between our heads and knees.' They said "Roger, will inform ARVNs of your position and situation" We said "thank you, you're very kind, out!"

When you're being shot at by friendly forces it's rather annoying to answer screwy questions!

If it wasn't for these little operations each month we'd go stir crazy with the perimeter guard (same thing day after day).

They're starting R&R (rest and relaxation) trips next month. Some of us decide to wait to go in June. We figure that trying to act like a human for 6 days and then coming back to the zoo wouldn't make much sense. We have decided to delay our "rest" until just before we leave Vietnam to go home.

Military command, Saigon has selected four Rest & Relaxation locations for us: Bangkok, Taipei, Hong Kong and Saigon. Seems we can't leave Asia for a rest.

31 January 66

Hue, South Vietnam

We finally got our Liberty. Four people from each platoon are released from duty for a single day starting at 0730 and ending at 1700. We are told to change into civilian clothes! Our only civilian clothes, if we have them at all, are buried in a seabag that has been sitting in wet weather for months. Still. Orders are orders and we turn to, to clean up and look like civilians. Some of us fire off a letter home to have some civvies shipped over. Hue City is our Liberty Town.

12 February 66

Phu Ba

As we settle into the enclave that is Phu Bai, our mail is more regular. Friends and family send us news of life in the States. The folks seem more willing to pass on the good with the bad news.

We share news of family health, loss of a high school or college friend killed in a car wreck, sports scores, space capsules and the demonstrations.

*Occasionally we comfort a buddy whose parents have divorced, or upon the death of a favorite relative.*

*"Dear John" letters are more frequent as girl friends find the local boy more interesting than letters from Vietnam. No one is comforted for a dear John letter.*

*We are beginning to chafe at staying in the enclave. We are volunteering for patrols. This is a job and we aren't doing it.*

*27 February 66*

*Phu Ba*

*Next to hearing Rock and Roll music from Saigon on clear nights, we enjoy listening to "Hanoi Hanna" twice a week. This month she has singled out the base at Phu Bai for a special series titled "we will be using your ammunition and trucks before March."*

*The VC have massed about 2000 troops in and around Hue/Phu Bai. Our patrols pick up anywhere from a single sniper to a 100 man company on a regular basis.*

*We patrol, look for a fight and then wait. And wait*

*6 March 66*

*Hill 225*

*We are still in the Phu Bai area, but liberty in Hue has been cancelled. Too bad, we enjoyed the time off and the people of that ancient city.*

*We've been pretty busy the past week with a few big sweep and clear operations here. Our sister Battalion (1/1) joined us and we found more action than could be expected since "Harvest Moon."*

*We ran into a company of hard core VC just south of the base. This time the VC, with support of North Vietnam regulars, stayed to fight. We obliged them. More than 100 of the enemy were captured or killed with only a few casualties from our side. We returned to the base wondering how we can win this fight, if we don't keep the ground we fought to secure. And some of us begin to wonder when we are going to take this fight into North Vietnam*

*Our platoon has moved up to the base perimeter hill 225 again. It's great to get a full night's sleep again. We've had a lot of transfers and, of course, the ever present few casualties. There are now 12 of the original members of the platoon that departed California. We began to fit in the replacement Marines who recently arrived from the States.*

14 March 66

*Phu Bai and Hill 225*

*Today the war stopped for the Marines and doggies at Phu Bai airfield.*

*Ann Margret and Johnny Rivers came here. She wore tights and sang to each one of us. Seeing her did wonders for morale! She's been adopted along with Elke Sommer as the pinup girls of the Nam War.*

*We must have worried her group as we came to the show in full combat gear. We were still expecting that attack that "Hanna" had told us about back in February. Some of us thought that if Charlie was nearby, he wasn't going to attack during the show if for no other reason to enjoy the music too.*

*A few days later the actor Robert Mitchum visited the base on Hill 225. He took the time to meet with as many of us as possible. We were told he had been in country for some time. He was real down to earth, just like one of the troops (another John Wayne – maybe). We hoped he left knowing his efforts were greatly appreciated.*

1 April 66

*North of Hue City*

*Those on R&R return directly to the field. Echo company has moved north of Hue City to support 1st Bn 4 Mar. 1 / 4 is building a base much like we built at Phu Bai. We are supporting a new policy established by General Westmoreland to place "Marines from the Delta to the DMZ." We are close to the 17th parallel and the DMZ.*

*The idea is to deny North Vietnam from crossing into the South directly across the DMZ. But thanks to the roads in Laos and Cambodia, North Vietnam doesn't need to cross the DMZ. Still we look impressive. It is good public relations for the folks back home and yes, maybe we can use this northern base to move into North Vietnam.*

14 April 66

*Phu Bai*

*The past two weeks have been pretty slack. We recognized Easter as a day for a long patrol north of the base to set up an ambush for a suspected VC supply route located in a region known as "Happy Valley."*

*We are supplied with C-ration chicken for dinner and rabbit stew (or what passes for a rabbit in Vietnam – tree rats). The irony of the date and meal are not lost on us and we have a good time, even if Charlie won't come out of his Valley to play.*

23 April 66

*North of Phu Bai – Vietnamese refugee village*

*During a recent patrol we came across a group of kids trying to fix a small foot bridge across a stream near their village. They use this bridge for moving the village harvest to market. And while we know it is also used by the VC – these kids were working too hard not to help. So we spread out a few guys for security and the rest of us stripped down and jumped into the water to help. The kids were happy for the help and we had a good time. It was a hot day and the water was cold. Their parents shared some rice cakes with us to say thanks and Doc made house calls in the ville to fix a little girl's arm. Some of the guys got massages from the kids when the work was done – It was a good Day!*

11 May 66

*North of Phu Bai*

*We are getting ready to move out of Phu Bai for locations near the DMZ. Our company has been relieved of duty to pull back from the perimeter and refit our supplies. We are treated to another USO show.*

*The performers were part of a band called the "Big Tiny Little Show." He plays an electric piano and is accompanied by Mary Petite (the gal who used to play opposite George Goebel). He played anything from favorites of the early 50s, to Dixieland, to Honky Tonk, to renditions of Ramsey Louis Trio's popular arrangement of late songs. Plus some raunchy jokes and songs that will never make a nationwide hookup. Nice send off.*

17 May 66

*Phu Bai,*

*We were standing by to stand by to wait to go North or South tomorrow but now the brass is not so sure so we're packing to go up to hill 225 as originally planned. We still wish that we will move further north. Phu Bai is getting too big, too much brass. It would be good to get out on our own for our remaining time here. The next 3 ½ months would go faster.*

*We've had Operations as far west as within 8 miles of Laos and as far north as Quang Tri with only sporadic contact. Action on the patrols is nil. We think the guerrilla force is finished and all that's left is the hard core NorthViets. There's nothing here for them until the rice is ready for harvest next fall during the monsoon season. We can feel something big coming on. We don't know what it is but there is something.*



21 May 66

*We send Mothers' Day letters home and send extra food over to the moms in the local villages. It is a hot day – well over 115 degrees, but dry. The winter rains are beginning to end.*

*We receive news from home and one of us got a book titled – “Our Vietnam Nightmare.” The author seems to support the troops but not the decision to be here. Unrest is also affecting operations north of Hue. Vietnamese dissenters from I Corps area, specifically Hue and DaNang, have been on strike to change the Saigon government. We may also be involved in a civil war in South Vietnam just like the civil war we are fighting between North and South Vietnam. We wonder why we don't take over the leadership of this war or pull out and lose the country to the communists. But then so long as the politicians run this war by bickering and confusion we'll stay here without a win to show for our trouble.*

*Some of us begin writing political activists such as Senator Fulbright. Hanoi Hanna is repeating her speeches to prove that America is abandoning her combat troops as well as the government of South Vietnam. We would like to stop Fulbright's speeches, but unfortunately, he is protected by the same freedoms that protect the antiwar demonstrators (like Dr. Spock). He had best curb his ramblings because a lot of his constituents over here are quite willing to vote him out of office this year.*

*The news is on now and General Wheeler just said “the civil unrest in Vietnam does not affect our military action” – HA!*

*We're back on 225. This should be the last time for us. We were going to move to Chu Lai to link up with the 1st Regiment and come back under the 1st Division (we've been under the 3rd Div since last November).*

30 May 66

*Sniper Ridge, Western South Vietnam*

*Welcome from “Sniper Ridge” RVN! Echo Company moved out 2 days before the rest of the battalion.*

*It feels good to be in the field again – Phu Bai was getting too big with too much brass. We're located in the Gobi Ton Ton district about 12 miles south of Quang Tri.*

*Our platoon has the farthest outpost (hill 51). We overlook a 6 sq mile valley and the Laotian/VN mountain range. We have been sniped at both days and always around 5PM. The VC were too predictable. We found the house they were shooting from and blew it to smithereens. Now we can enjoy our C-rations without interruption.*

*One of our sister companies was coming under constant sniper and rocket fire as they moved to join us. We moved off the Hill to support them and clean out the valley of VC*

and North Vietnamese regulars that had been harassing them. It was like a US Civil War story of Sherman's March to the Sea – we burned everything in sight and blew up a large underground system of tunnels and supply bunkers.

The fighting was fierce, mixed with yelling and smoke and ashes as if it was a story from "Guadalcanal Diary." The aggressiveness of the Marines showed – charging pillboxes, burning houses, yelling and cheering. For an hour the fighting stayed hot and fast.

We Loved it!! The thrill, the excitement, the noise – we felt like John Wayne would come charging by any minute. Our platoon didn't lose anyone but the rest of the company wasn't so fortunate. All in all we lost 12 men – 8 dead 4 wounded. Five of whom were hit by a smart sniper. The bugger was so well hidden he took out five men before they got him. And did they get him. What happened to that guy with bayonets and small arms fire shouldn't happen to eggshells in a disposal. But a lot of damn good guys bought it because of that sniper ( 2 of the guys had orders home June 1) – we were definitely not sorry for doing him in.

When we moved through the Ville the last night, a large group of VC walked right into to us. The funny part was one of our guys – we call him Little Dog (because he gets VC out of tunnels by barking like a dog) was out in front of our lines as a lookout. Little dog speaks very well, college educated, but that night we thought he had lost it. And we did lose, but in laughter.

When Charley moved into us, Dog let out a yell saying "great goobly woobly – we are going to die momma!" You had to be there but I think what saved us was, we and probably the VC, were laughing so hard we couldn't hit each other and broke off the fight.

Unfortunately, we may have lost our Platoon Leader. Lt. Pickersgill was working with our 3rd squad and elements from 1st platoon over to our left. We were told he was hit and being medivaced but by the time we got to choppers to help wounded Marines aboard all we could see was Lt Pick being lifted into the chopper. We don't know if he made it. We hope so - he is a great leader. More on that when we get news.

We finished pushing the NVA into the mountains where our war planes did the rest. Then we moved back through the area. When we got to the edge of the valley, tanks, artillery and planes gave us quite a show. From about 15 miles off we saw five villages wiped off the map. This morning the valley was still smoking.

We are all trained to call in air and artillery strikes. We back each other up at all positions. There are fewer of us but we are able to do our jobs. We understand that a WW II Battleship has been parked off the beach to support as well. We are eager to give them a call.

10 June 66

Western Vietnam

Have a few moments during Operation "Florida." The sweat has dried leaving a lot of salt so we can write without dripping crud all over it.

Operation Florida is taking place in a huge mountain range in the north west corner

of the country – under the “canopy.” In other words the jungle. The brass finally got smart – we’re not wearing helmets and our loads are lighter.

It’s kind of screwy – a little too political, I think. It’s a search and destroy mission. We know hard core NViets are in there; part of an 800 man NViet Rgt. Because we caught one – uniform and all. But the operation is a “don’t care operation – if we get something fine, if not, well okay.

There are a lot of ARVN units being merged in with us for the Operation. We support, they lead – sort of. We think they are here to move into Hue, which has lost a lot of its neutral status when VC fired rockets into that “open city.” Too bad - it was a pretty town.

We got a lot of outside news in the last mail call. News about Surveyor, Gemini, Nam and the Indy 500 made for interesting reading. Keep sending the news, we only hear what Hanna wants us to hear. It is good to read that great things are being done in space and that our professional sports haven’t been affected by this war. We read of marriages and deaths in the family and friends who are joining up or continuing their college education.

We don’t read much about the anti-war movement and assume that the country supports our actions and that the anti-war groups are small in number. We feel better about our mission.

16 June 66

#### Western Vietnam

We’re on 12 hour standby to join the 101st Airborne in Operation Kansas. They are operating in the old “Harvest Moon” area where we spent most of December. What they’re doing there we don’t know, but being so mobile, they seem to hop from one location to another without occupying the place. The tactic must keep Charley guessing but there is no permanence to it. When the Army leaves the area, the VC move right back in.

Our friends and family are beginning to ask what happens when our tour is over. We ask and are told that if we survive until the 13 months are up we will get individual transfer orders 10 days prior to leaving country. We are to leave by plane, and not a ship, from DaNang to Okinawa then El Toro (probably, then El Toro to Home). A few of us decide to get some dental work done before we go home. Like everything else here, our teeth are rotting from the water, food and lifestyle. We are told that we shouldn’t wear our uniforms when we get back home.

We got word that Lt Pickersgill, Pick, was killed down south somewhere near Chu Lai. Why he was on patrol we don’t know and can’t get any more information. We thought we lost him last month. It is hard to find out he was alive and then killed without us to protect him. We feel we let him down. Sgt Little is platoon commander now.

24 June 66

*Dong Ha*

*We are now at Dong Ha – boarder village to the DMZ. If we were to climb on top of one the buildings we can see the other side of the 17th parallel*

*Yes, buildings – we are housed in an old girl's school next to an Air Force compound. Our area of responsibility is a one acre compound – no patrols*

*It's really too good to be true. After 11 months of sweat, strain and blood we have this! Sunbathe or sleep during the day. Beer and soda and movies at night.*

*We find ourselves “assigned” to base camp duty. A couple of us landed the job of Laundry NCO and liaison. We have four very nice ladies doing the company laundry while keeping a steady stream of chatter asking us about the States. Our language skills get tested every day. It's great duty.*

3 July 66

*DMZ*

*In our last letter we said we've seen Vietnam – forget it. We thought we couldn't go too much farther north but we were wrong.*

*We are at Cam Loa – if the wind is right I can spit into the DMZ.*

*Our 155s (artillery) can reach across the border from here (approximately 6 miles). The interesting thing is so can Charlie – point to ponder.*

*No doubt you have read about the fights north of Hue and south of Hue. We were pulled into Operation Jay without much advance notice or information as we took helicopters to a location north of Hue along a road now called the “street of no joy.” The fighting was very close, so much so we were ducking shrapnel from our own air strikes. We came out on top with a few casualties. One was Dave Reyner, our old fire team leader. It's tough because he was getting out of the Corps this Sept. Last fall we had agreed to see each other's families if the worst should happen – we plan to visit his folks in Houston when we get back.*

*Letters from home tell us of bombings in Hanoi and Hai Phong? It's about time. We bet Fulbright and his student flunkies are climbing the walls – ha!*

*We spent about 2 days with Air Cav, pulling landing zone security and checking a few tunnels until another battalion relieved us. There is much activity in this area between Hue, Dong Ha and the DMZ. Our patrols are getting longer. The happy days at Dong Ha are behind us as we get back to work.*

26 July 66

*Western Vietnam and the Rock Pile*

*Echo Company has been in Dong Ha and Cam Loa for about 2 weeks. We found a large number of weapons storage bunkers and underground training camps near the western approach to Laos. Our reports gained enough interest that the entire 2nd Battalion joined us bringing extra gear and troops for us and 4 more Battalions to surround a valley area known as Rockpile as part of Operation Hastings. Operation Hastings was kicked off this week. It became the biggest fight we have ever experienced, both in fighting fury and numbers of Marines and enemy in one location.*

*We lost a chopper the first day and were mortared the first night, plus these past days with various attacks – we bag, on the average, 10 VC per day. The grass is dry, and, as expected, the nighttime flares set off a couple of grass fires. We found ourselves digging holes in the valley floor to wait out the fire storms on the surrounding hills. By the time the smoke cleared the NVA occupied the very hills we left the night before. Rather than attack uphill we called in air strikes. The poor devils on the hill had no place to hide. We wonder how much different this war would be if they had the air cover and not us.*

*SSgt. Little (old platoon commander) was wounded yesterday leaving only twelve of us who trained with 2nd Platoon/Echo Company in California a year before. The new guys are very good at their jobs and continue to look to us for leadership and tactics. If it weren't for the action, we would feel bad about how small our old unit has become.*



## January through July 1966 Photographs

### January 1966: Phu Bai



### January 1966: Phu Bai Operations – first morning



**January 1966: At Phu Bai**



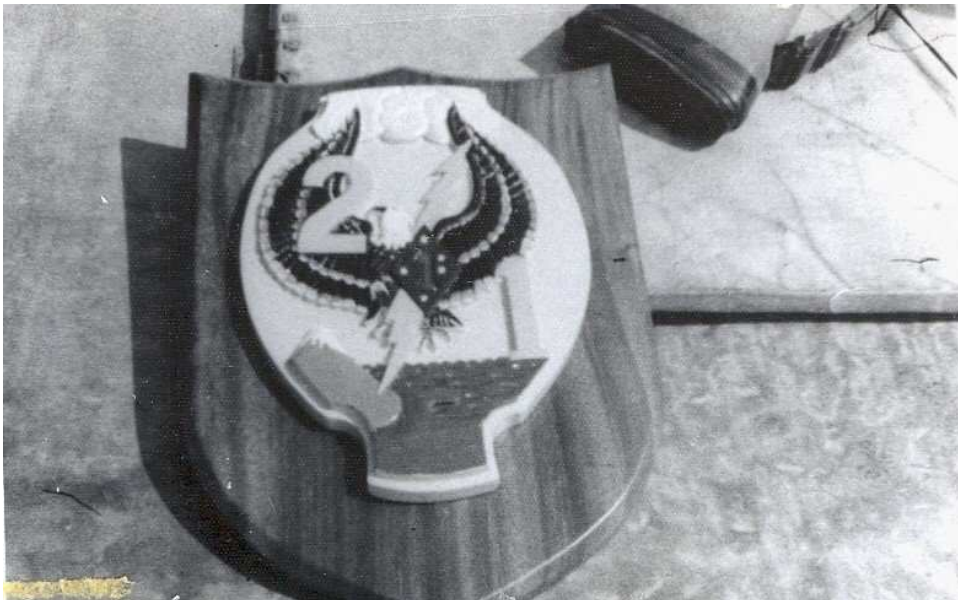
**January 1966: Augusta – Ho Chi Platoon Mascot**



January 1966: Safe Conduct Ticket



January 1966: 2/1 Deployment Plaque

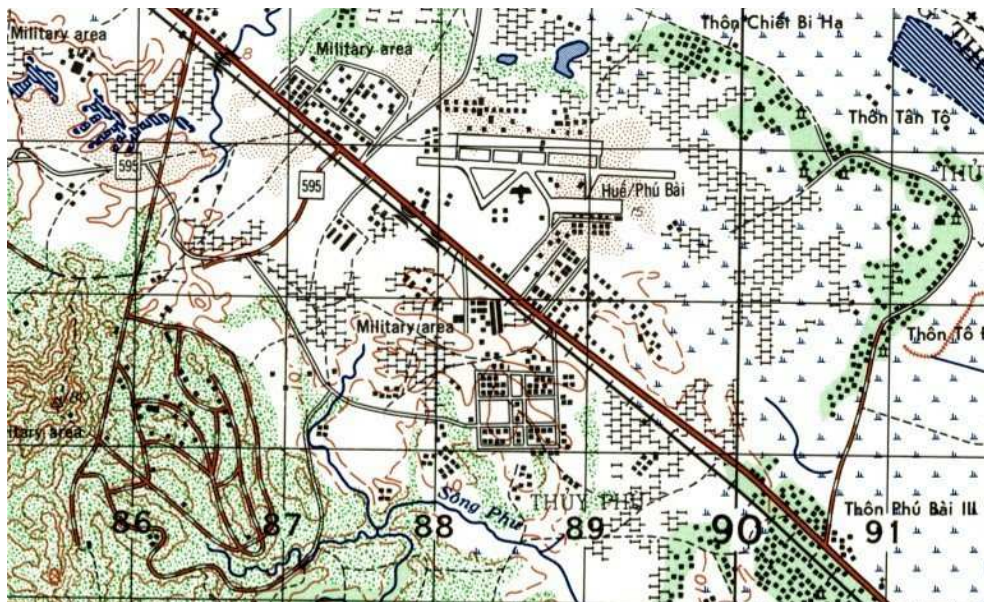




## January 1966: Phu Bai, 2nd Platoon CP



## January 1966: Phu Bai Tactical Map



**January 1966: Command Post after rocket attack**



**January 1966: Coffee and the 106**





**February 1966: Operation Eagle Flight at 17th Parallel**



**February 1966: Operation Eagle Flight**



**February 1966: Hill 225, Phu Bai**



**February 1966: Delivery day – Hill 225 Supply Flight**



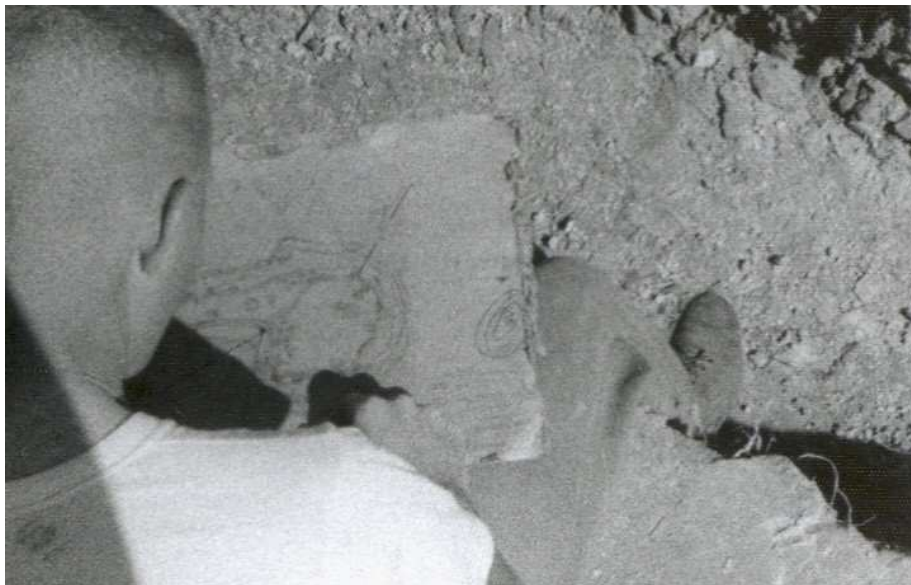
**February 1966: Hill 225 looking East**



**February 1966: Hill 225 Gifts (Pick's burp gun and M14)**



**February 1966: Lt Pick with his “cardboard tactical map” of Hill 225**



**February 1966: Hill 225. 2nd Platoon Command (SSgt Little, Lt Pickersgill)**





**February 1966: Hill 225 looking North from Bunker**



**February 1966: Hill 225 ‘sighting the 106’**





**February 1966: Road (Highway 1) to Hue thru Village of Phu Bai**



**February 1966: South of Hue City**



**February 1966: French Catholic Church and School, Hue City**



**February 1966: ARVN and MAAG Hdqrs, Hue City**



**February 1966: River of Perfumes, Hue City**



**February 1966: Phu Bai refugee compound**



**March 1966: Phu Bai Hospital – Why we fought.**



**March 1966: Fishing off Highway 14**





**March 1966: Patrol along Quang Tri RR line**



**March 1966: Highway 14 Patrol break**



**March 1966: Fixing the Son Ba Ha “bridge” – Winning Hearts and Minds**



**March 1966: Ferrell and Jackson – “Tunnel Rats”**





**March 1966: “Ann Margret” makes our day.**



**March 1966: First Cold Beer – San Miguel...**



**March 1966: “Security detachment” and bridge repair supervisors at Phu Bai**



**March 1966: And a good massage....**





**March 1966: Woody and Ike Liberty Call in Hue – civilian uniform and no weapons....**



**March 1966: First ‘fresh’ fruit**



**March 1966: Phu Bai moving day..**



**March 1966: Doc Steve Byars – a great Marine Doc**



**March 1966: Worst Day – Evacuating Villagers**



**April 1966: Khe Sanh before it was Khe Sanh**





**April 1966: 2nd Platoon Hdqrs with “Army” personnel at Khe Sanh**



**May 1966: Kobi TonTon**





**May 1966: Kobi TonTon re-supply**



**April 1966: Kobi TonTon using Naval Gunfire**



**April 1966: 2nd Platoon adopted by Alameda High School, Alameda CA**



**May 1966: On the road to Dong Ha with "Hochi"**



**May 1966: Dong Ha Air Force Compound**



**June 1966: Dong Ha air field**



**June 1966: Dong Ha Girls School. 2nd Platoon base of operations**



**June 1966: Dong Ha Laundry Chief**





**June 1966: Ike and GW (Gary Ford) - 2nd Platoon Laundry Kings.**



**June 1966: Loading for Hastings:**

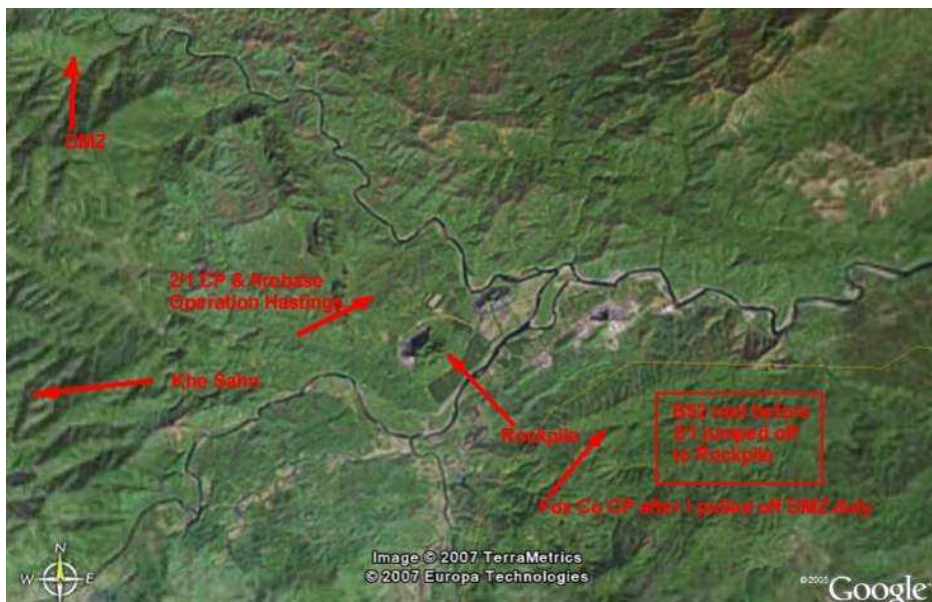




## July 1966: Operation Hastings



## July 1966: Operation Hastings and Rockpile



## **REBUILDING IN DaNANG AND SAYING GOODBYE**

**AUGUST TO OCTOBER 1966**

Of the original platoon, 16 of us traveled by truck down Highway 1 from Dong Ha airport to just outside DaNang – the new Battalion location. I never did find out what area we were in – it just didn't seem to matter other than it was very flat and very isolated.

Of the Echo Company Marines and Corpsmen who deployed in August 1965 most of the surviving officers and enlisted began to rotate back to the States. New replacements arrived and we trained them. The company and platoon commands changed from Sergeants and Corporals back to officers and new NCOs.

We got new utilities and jungle boots to replace our rotted out gear. We patrolled around the local villages and were sniped at from time to time. Some of the 'old salts' were sent out to the villages with the Corpsman to live with and help the villagers who supported us with information on NVA staging areas. I felt we were doing something worthwhile in those villages – they were wonderful people.

As a "short timer" I sat on the side lines one October morning watching the company brief for a large sized search and destroy mission west of DaNang. I signed over my squad and took pictures of the new 2nd Platoon as the next generation of 2/1 formed and then moved out of the area.

The last 2 Marines from 2nd Platoon and the original company clerk mustered out to DaNang airfield in an Amtrak. We turned in our weapons, jungle utilities (but kept our boots and other memorabilia) and accepted our transportation orders to CONUS (Continental US). We were given new uniforms, and shoes. Clerks tried to update our records from bits and pieces of information almost destroyed when our company CP was hit by rockets months before. We were given medals and ribbons to wear, instructing us on the appropriate placement of such items on our person, and finished up with a quick physical. We were given sheets, blankets and a rack to sleep in for two days. I was never more scared than during those two days in the transit barracks. I was unarmed and without my brothers around me. I felt very alone.

In the morning we were marched in our clean Khaki uniforms to the airbase where the most beautiful Braniff Airlines jet I have ever seen was waiting to take us to Okinawa. We spent another two days in Okinawa, at Camp Hansen, somewhat isolated from everyone on the base, but allowed into town without restriction.

On 19 October 1966 we boarded an equally beautiful United Airlines jet with round-eye, blond stewardesses fussing over us from Okinawa to Honolulu. They let us stretch our legs at the airport. We wondered why we were being stared at but enjoyed the eye candy of tanned legs, hamburgers, french fries, and fresh salads.

My tour ended late in the afternoon when the nice United Airlines crew dropped us off at Marine Air Station El Toro, California, United States of America – just a few miles up the road from Camp Pendleton where our journey began so long ago.

## **Rebuilding and Saying Goodbye Letters Home**

*2 August 66*

### *Operation Hastings and DaNang*

*Letters from the folks include clippings of the battle known to us as Operation Hastings.*

*About the middle of July there was a big build up at Dong Ha and Cam Lo. The result was 5 Marine battalions being flown into an “L” shaped area about 30 sq miles stretching from the coast along the DMZ to the Laotian border. 3Bn/4th Marines landed first. We were to land first but when we started into our LZ one of our choppers was shot down (all aboard killed). The next morning we followed 4th Marines into the area. That night we were mortared and lost a few more of our platoon. From then on we had contact with the NVA at least 3 times a day.*

*We were able to stay between the Laotian border and the NVA without being detected. When we did make contact, the NVA seemed disorganized as if we caught them by surprise – a first. We would walk into NVA soldiers headed toward us on the trails – small bands would try break through us in a suicidal frontal attack. We obliged their desire to die.*

*We took the NVA 346th Division off the list. Echo accounted for 78 of the Battalion's 230 killed or captured NVA.*

*Intelligence compiled after the Operation was that Ho Chi Minh wanted Quang Tri (4th largest city in South Vietnam – about 30Km north of Hue) for a bargaining point to stop the bombing of the North and possibly in anticipation of an invasion of the North. The people of Hue were worried that they would be overrun by the NVA which caused them to switch sides and support the Saigon government to save their necks. When we came back through Hue after finishing up Hastings they lined the streets and cheered as if we just liberated them from the communist north. We didn't expect the support – real or imagined and enjoyed the recognition. It felt good to save a major city.*

*We lost a few good friends and covered a lot of territory, but the weather was fairly good. We used trails instead of fighting in the jungle and supply was in quantity, plus quality – it made it a little more bearable than the shortages we suffered during Operation Harvest Moon.*

*We've been away from Phu Bai four months. Come next week we will have chalked up more time in the field than any other Battalion to date.*

*Operation Hastings was a fitting end to 12 mos (next week) service.*

*Now with our ranks filled with almost 90% new people we are heading to Da Nang to revamp. We don't know where in DaNang but everyone thinks it will be a comfortable area. Some of us will be getting orders home as soon as we get to DaNang*

*15 August 66*

*DaNang*

*Welcome from the suburbs of DaNang. 2nd Bn / 1st Marines is now with its own people – 1st Marine Regiment. The first time this unit has been together since we left the States.*

*We're south and west of DaNang air-base in an area near an old village. The living is great but no slack. We're constantly busy with security patrols; mine sweeping details and "Sparrow Hawk" detail – a quick reaction force formed to quickly aid any unit in trouble.*

*Those of us with "time in country" provide as much training to the new guys as possible during patrols to outlying villages. We begin the process of turning over our platoon, squad and team to our replacements. It is difficult to give up your command, no matter how small the team.*

*Our sea bags caught up with us. We were supplied with new utilities and to replace our rotting gear. We are also trying out new weapons and flak jackets during our patrols. The flak jackets protect us from shrapnel but not a bullet. They are heavy and hot to wear. We choose to leave them behind until we are ordered to wear them by our new company Commander. He wants us "salts" to set an example for the new guys. The new rifle (AR16) is not reliable. We kept our M-14s.*

*Your mail and packages found us too. The news from home is a month old and some of the birthday cakes and candy have melted into the popcorn stuffing – still the chocolate popcorn tastes great with 100 degree melted icing. We are beginning to think about going home soon.*

*1 September 66*

*DaNang*

*The last 9 of us from the original Echo Company aren't allowed to go on patrols anymore, but we aren't going home either. We are stuck in the "rear with the gear." The people we trained and led into combat are being led by someone else – a freaking new guy (FNG) from the States. We have been looking for ways to get off the "base." We are going buggy sitting here getting fat and lazy – it's screwy but we are bored stiff of being a short timer.*

*The plans for the future are pretty slack for this rainy season – mostly Civil Affairs (baby washing, etc.) and local training.*

*That's about it from the pasteurized rest home – The next letter we write will be about our orders home – we hope.*

4 September 66

*Change of orders. The short timers are leading small squads into some hill top villages north of here to provide support for Marine snipers operating near the border. After a week or so in the villages we find that supporting our Corpsman while they deliver babies, take care of the sick and meet with the village elders about the next planting season is more fun. We think the brass knew we needed something to do. We are happy to be away from the rear and the gear.*

*The bad news is we won't be leaving Vietnam until October.*

*Still, we thought you would enjoy the attached letter from our Company Clerk.*

*(Author's note: following letter created as a joke by Company clerk to raise our spirits )*

#### October 1966: Letter Home

##### HEADQUARTERS

2nd Battalion, 1st Marines  
1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF  
FPO, San Francisco, 96602

From: Commanding Officer, ECHO Company

To: The Parents of Cpl. xxxxxxxxxxxx

Subj: Return for Rehabilitation; case of

Ref: (a) BUMED Inst 4023.1D

1. Corporal xxxxxxxxxxxx , having completed a tour of duty in the Far East, has been permitted to return to the United States for rehabilitation. Just keep in mind that your Marine has in all probability, been subjected to severe psychological traumas. You should consider it your solemn duty to assist in his rehabilitation in every way possible. Aside from the most obvious measures that can be taken to facilitate readjustment and prevent relapse of ASIATICUS FUNATICUS

2. Very soon the above named person will be in your midst, De-Americanized, demoralized, and dehydrated; ready once again to take his place as a human being with freedom and justice for all,



engaging in life, liberty, and the somewhat delayed pursuit of happiness.

3. To assist you in your efforts, the following information will be helpful:

a. Unusual behavior may be as follows:

- (1) Scorning civilized dress and walking about semi-nude.
- (2) Thousand yard stare in a 10 foot room.
- (3) Insisting on building a machine gun bunker in the front yard.
- (4) Referring to an air mattress as a "Rubber Lady".
- (5) He may attempt to persuade the young men of the neighborhood for the following athletic events: foxhole digging sandbag filling, night recon patrols, stealing strategic materials from local organizations, setting up perimeter guards, practice loading bombs on the family car, plotting positions (on a map) of gangs in the area, and keeping an up-to-date order of battle maps.
- (6) He will at all times walk around fully armed and encouraging others to the same.

b. In making your preparations to welcome him back into respectable society, you must make a few allowances for the crude environment in which he has suffered in the past thirteen months. In a word, he may be somewhat ASIATIC, suffering from stages of VIET-CONGITIS and too much Kool-Aide.

c. Therefore, show no alarm if he prefers to squat rather than sit in a chair, walk around in thong sandals and a towel, slyly offers to sell cigarettes to the postman and picks at his food suspiciously as if you were trying to poison him. Don't be surprised if he answers all questions with "I hate this place", "Affirmative", "Negative", "Number One" or "Number Ten". Be tolerant when he tries to buy everything at less than the asking price, accuses the grocer of being a thief, and refuses to enter an establishment that doesn't have steel mesh over the windows and doors. Due to the unsanitary water conditions in the Far East, this poor unfortunate Marine has been forced to drink such things as V.O., Gin, Scotch, Vodka, Bourbon, Rum, Whiskey, Wine, Beer, and local (native beer). Don't be surprised if he gives all drinks the "Acid Test" and strains for broken glass.

d. For the first few months (until he is house broken),

be especially watchful when he is in the company of women, particularly young and beautiful specimens. The few American girls he may have seen since arriving overseas were either too old or married to personnel who out ranked him; therefore, his first reaction upon meeting a "Round Eye" might prove to be embarrassing. In a relatively short period of time however, his profanity will decrease enough to permit him to associate with mixed groups, and soon be speaking English as well as he ever did. He may also complain about sleeping in a room and refuse to go to bed without a mosquito net.

e. Below are listed some of the Do's and Don'ts:

- (1) Don't mention about going to the beach or going on an overnight camping trip.
- (2) Don't serve canned foods, recombined milk, instant coffee, or other similar foods. This may result in a wild rage.
- (3) Make no flattering remarks about exotic Southeast Asia and avoid mentioning the benefits of overseas duty such as; seasonal weather (typhoons, sandstorms, monsoons, etc), lavish beaches and beautiful resort areas such as CHU LAI, PHU BAI, DA NANG, QUI NHON, Hue.
- (4) Do inform all friends, neighbors and relatives to stay away from the premises for at least 48 hours. This is the danger period.
- (5) Do give him an abundance of love.
- (6) Keep in mind that beneath this tanned, rugged exterior there beats a heart of pure gold. Treasure this, for it's the only thing of value he has left, even though he has tried to pawn it on several occasions. Treat him with kindness, give him an occasional quart of milk, and you will be able to rehabilitate this hollow shell of the man you once knew.

4. Send no more mail to FPO 96602 after receipt of this letter for he is leaving the tropics in a few days and heading for the land of the "Big PX"
5. Future mailing address will be home.
6. Fill the ice box with beer.

"THE KID IS COMING HOME"

## Rebuilding and Goodbye Photographs

### August 1966: DaNang Bay



### August 1966: Echo Company Hdqrs and Command, DaNang



**August 1966: 2nd Platoon Home DaNang**



**August 1966: 1stSgt Byers turns over 2/1 to GSgt Donavon**



**August 1966: Echo Command Team**



**August 1966: L to R: Walters, Byers, Lavendas, Mizelle, Brithurst**





**September 1966: Woody, Doc and Ike with “Army” types on Hospital Call**



**September 1966: Echo Company Office and ‘friends’**



**September 1966: New Echo Company**



**September 1966: Short Timers and Salts...**



**September 1966: 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon, Echo**



**September 1966: 2nd Platoon Echo**





**September 1966: Turning over command of the squad**



**October 1966: Echo – New Breed and Vets**



**October 1966: Echo 2/1 Briefing for Company size operation East of DaNang**



**October 1966: Briefing**





## October 1966: Orders Home

HEADQUARTERS  
2d Battalion, 1st Marines  
1st Marines Division (Rein) FMF  
FPO San Francisco, 96602

1/JLT/dcc  
1320  
25Sep66

BATTALION SPECIAL ORDER  
NUMBER..... 191-66

1. The following permanent change of station is effected during October 1966, GOVAIRSURDIR II TRANSOCEANIC. TravChar appn 1771105. Subhead 2751 to & fr DUINS excess 20 wks within CONUS; 2753 to fr or within o/s (Incl to or fr DUINS) as apro, MPMC-67 OC 21: FAN 74120 Off Tv1; 74162 (Enl Entl) trans HHG; FAN 74157 (Off), 74165 (Enl Entl) excess bag; OC 12, FAN 74157 (Off), 74167 (Enl ENTL) DLA; BCN 43689 to & fr DUINS excess 20 wks within CONUS; 44690 to fr or within o/s (Incl to or fr DUINS), AAA 27. Pers GOVAIR 551bs Off, 351bs (Enl excess bag). Par 5017, 5018, 515C.2g & 9151.7 MARCORPSMAN & JTR par 8003 applies. Cpl's over 4 yrs serv above w/acquired depn auth concurrent trav IAW MCO 1300.8G BUMEDINSTN 6230.1D applies to all pers prior to dept to CONUS. co's auth to grant lv in Haw to elig pers IAW FMFPacO 1050.3. 6/7 /105/53/3/7/096 (Enl Tv1) 6/7/105/53/5/74165 (Enl Bag). Auth tv1 in conus via POV. E-5 & above auth proceed 4 days in CONUS. Auth 30 days Delrep. Auth 3 mos adv pay E-5 & above Auth adv mileage.'

Name \_\_\_\_\_ :Tr Fm : DofD:- \_\_\_\_\_ Report to \_\_\_\_\_

## October 16, 1966: Job is Done



**October 1966: Last Muster**



**October 1966: 2nd Platoon, Echo Company, 2/1 Last Patrol**



**October 1966: Freedom Bird**



**October 1966: Camp Hansen (again)**





**October 1966: Aloha!**



**October 1966: Back In The USA (Long Beach, CA)**



## 2nd PLATOON, ECHO COMPANY 1965

<u>LAST NAME</u>	<u>FIRST NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>HOME STATE</u>
PICKERSGILL	DOUGLAS	2NDLT	KANSAS
LITTLE	JAMES, J.	SSGT	MISSOURI
WILSON	GEORGE M.	SGT.	PENNSYLVANIA
STEEN	PAUL	SGT	TEXAS
LUCAS	WILLIAM S.	SGT	WEST VIRGINIA
WAULDERS	WILLIAM	LCPL	WISCONSIN
JAMES	RODNEY A.	PVT	NEW JERSEY
KARI	JYRI	PFC	MICHIGAN
HICKS	DONALD W.	CPL	ARKANSAS
MAHSEET	EDMOND L.	PVT	OKLAHOMA
ALLEN	JOHN E.	LCPL	TEXAS
KENNY	JOHN H.	PFC	NEW YORK
SCHULTZ	KENNETH W.	LCPL	NEBRASKA
FORD	SHERMAN A.	CPL	MICHIGAN
EDDY	NORMAN L. JR	CPL	CONNECTICUT
MITCHENER	LARRY E.	LCPL	MISSOURI
MAUL	RICHARD A.	PFC	ILLINOIS
PHILLIPS	BOBBY R.	LCPL	LOUISIANA
REYNER	DAVID E.	CPL	PENNSYLVANIA
FORD	GARY W.	LCPL	KANSAS
ISENBURG	THOMAS F.	LCPL	OHIO
WOODS	FRANCIS M.	LCPL	OHIO
ANDERSON	HIRAM A.	PFC	IDAHO
BYARS	STEVEN	HM1	NEVADA
MURRAY	JOHN E.	LCPL	MICHIGAN
HUERTA	JUAN	PVT	NEW MEXICO
MELTON	JAMES D.	PFC	WISCONSIN
ATKINSON	GREG	PVT	ILLINOIS
NEWLIN	CECIL F.	PFC	OHIO
SHEA	ROBERT	CPL	CALIFORNIA
SPETH	WILLIAM R.	CPL	WISCONSIN
FERRELL	MAJOR (Tony)	LCPL	PENNSYLVANIA
STIRSMAN	JON E.	LCPL	ILLINOIS
HILL	DWAIN L.	CPL	MICHIGAN
WILKINS	EDWARD M.	PFC	CALIFORNIA
KNUTSON	JOHN M.	PFCI	NDIANA
PORTER	ORVILLE L.	CPL	MICHIGAN
POTTER	JAMES	LCPL	MICHIGAN
HAWKINS	HOMER L.	LCPL	TEXAS
TURNER	GEORGE L.	LCPL	TEXAS
STENZEL	PAUL	SGT	ILLINOIS

Paul Stenzel of 1st Platoon connected Pickersgill and Isenburg in 1998

"When we lose a Marine we become his witness. He will not die as long as we live and because we are his witness we must make the best of our life and his." SSgt Jim Little



## FINAL THOUGHTS

Jim Little passed away in 2007. He retired from the Corps as a 1st Sergeant and took care of service men and women as a VA Regional manager until his death – over 50 years of service to his country. He and Bonnie were active in the Marine Corps League. The surviving members of the platoon participated in his military funeral.

Gary Ford survived his wounds, married Sandy, his high school sweetheart, and helps people with disabilities, even though, he himself is severely crippled. We call each other on our birthday each year.

We recently found our Corpsman, Steve Byars – our “Doc.” He struggles with the memories of the Marines he couldn’t save but remains our conscience and protector from his wheel chair. Because of Doc, we are here today. Thank you my friend.

Doug Pickersgill fulfilled his commitment to his Marines and brought new meaning to Honor and Courage as he and his wife Cindy successfully campaigned to get ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease) recognized by the VA. He continued to fight for the rights of Veterans and his Platoon until he succumbed to ALS in 2011. Family, friends and Veterans from WW II to the current campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq attended the funeral. They know, as I do, what “Pick” had done “if he had lived.” We are witnesses to those who go before us.

It may be 40 years later, but when we meet we are in our 20s again. I am privileged to know and continue to know such brave men. To the Marines and Corpsman of 2nd Platoon, Echo Company and to the Sailors and Soldiers I served with -- Semper Fidelis.



**Lt Doug Pickersgill**

**SSgt Jim Little  
Vietnam 1965**

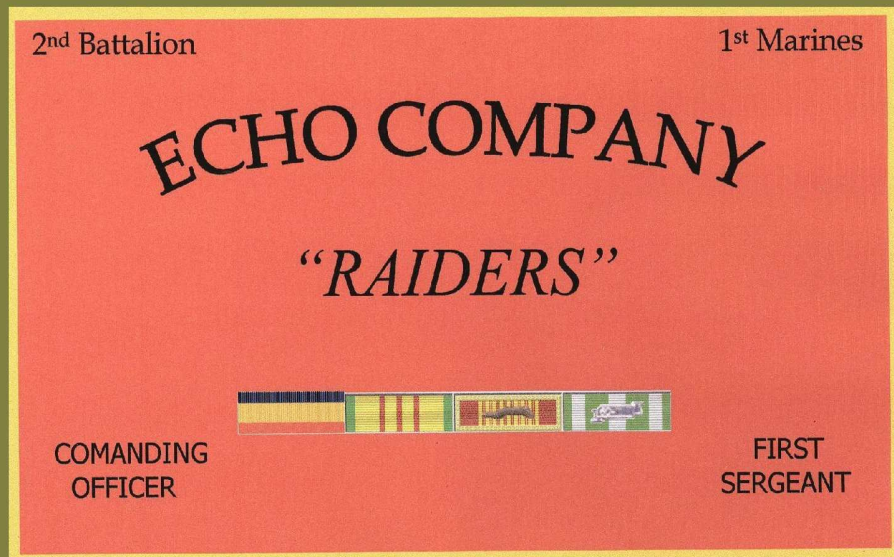
**Cpl Tom Isenburg**





## A STORY TOLD THROUGH LETTERS

Letters Home is a story about the Marines and Corpsman of 2nd Platoon Echo Company who deployed to Vietnam in 1965. Our story is told through letters and photographs we sent home to share our experiences with our families and friends.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Isenburg served as rifleman and radioman in 2nd Platoon Echo. At the end of his enlistment he returned to college, started a family and a career in Aerospace and Telecom Industries. He kept his combat experiences away from family and friends until in 1998 when his Platoon Commander, Doug Pickersgill, invited him to share his memories with the surviving members of the Platoon. This Book is dedicated to those memories